

# Forceful Diplomacy: China's Cross-Border Villages in Bhutan

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Lhodrag (Tibet)

Menchuma

Upper Jakarlung

Chagdzom

Pagsamlung valley

Lower Jakarlung

Khenpajong



Jasabi

Dungkar

Kurtoed (Bhutan)

# Summary

In 2016, China began constructing a village in territory generally understood to be part of Bhutan. It was five years before the existence of that village was discovered by outside observers or noticed by foreign governments.<sup>1</sup>

By that time, China had already built two other villages within Bhutan's customary borders. These too were located in remote areas high in the Himalayas or in Himalayan gorges.

There are now 22 such villages and settlements.<sup>2</sup> Judging from satellite imagery, these Chinese villages and settlements consist of some 752 residential blocks divided into an estimated 2,284 residential units, each suitable for one family-sized unit. To fill these units, the Chinese authorities have relocated or are currently relocating approximately 7,000 people to these previously unpopulated areas of Bhutan, together with an unknown number of officials, construction workers, border police and military.

To construct these villages, China has annexed approximately 825 sq kms of land that was formerly within Bhutan, constituting just over 2% of Bhutan's territory. At least two new sites within Bhutan have been cleared for construction, many of the existing villages are being expanded, bids have been sought by the Chinese government for the construction of at least one other village, and the Chinese authorities have announced that three of the existing villages are going to be upgraded to towns.

This report documents the location, size and purpose of these cross-border villages and settlements. It discusses their continuing construction in territory long understood to be part of Bhutan, the role of land appropriation in the 40-year-long border negotiations between China and Bhutan, and the increasing, and apparently unnecessary, use by China of hard power in its relations with a much smaller neighbour.

China's cross-border villages are being built in two main areas. Eight of the Chinese villages are in a western area of Bhutan that the historian Tsering Shakya says was ceded to Bhutan in 1913 by the then ruler of Tibet, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.<sup>3</sup> China has built those

eight villages for strategic reasons: it seeks possession of that western area of Bhutan because it includes an 89-sq km plateau called Doklam, control of which would give China major strategic advantage in its ongoing confrontation with India. China also says its aim is to get Bhutan to agree to host a Chinese embassy in the Bhutanese capital, Thimphu.

China's 14 other cross-border villages and settlements are in areas of north-eastern Bhutan. These areas, known as the Beyul Khenpajong (together with the Pagsamlung and Jakarlung valleys) and Menchuma, have only been claimed by China since the 1980s. Until at least the early 1990s China marked these areas on official maps as parts of Bhutan.

These north-eastern areas of Bhutan have no compelling military or strategic value to China. Its reason for annexing them was to exchange them for the areas that China wants in the western sector of Bhutan. China made this purpose clear in 1990 when it proposed what has become known as the "package deal". In that deal, China offered to drop its claims for the north-eastern areas of Bhutan and to return those areas to Bhutan if Bhutan would give China the territories it wants in Bhutan's west, including the Doklam plateau.

Bhutan, however, cannot in practice give the Doklam area to China without Indian consent, because of Indo-Bhutanese treaties which require Bhutan to respect India's security concerns. As a result, since the mid-1990s, Bhutan has delayed giving its agreement to China's proposed exchange.

The report describes China's response to Bhutan's failure to accept the package deal. That response took the form of a six-stage strategy. In the first stage, in the early 1990s, China sent local herders into disputed areas, where their interactions with Bhutanese pastoralists pushed the latter out of those areas. In the second stage, the Tibetan herders built huts or shelters in the disputed areas. Thirdly, military foot-patrols were sent into those areas, supposedly to support those herders. Fourthly, improvised structures were erected for use as military outposts, which were later upgraded to permanent structures.

In the fifth stage, from around 2004, roads were constructed into the claimed areas, connecting the outposts to towns within Tibet (China). Finally, in 2016, the construction of villages began in the claimed areas.

In March 2023, the Bhutanese government, which appears to have little option but to accept most of China's negotiating demands, indicated that it was close to concluding a deal with China involving an exchange of territory. But China's cross-border village construction has not stopped. Instead, it has accelerated: since early 2023, seven more villages or settlements have been constructed in Bhutan's north-east, more than the tripling the housing stock in that area.

The report's analysis of China's 2023-24 construction surge concludes that China is now extremely unlikely to return to Bhutan the areas where it has built villages. Those areas include about 80% of the disputed territory that China has annexed. China seems likely to argue that it is not obligated to return these areas because Bhutan, given India's security concerns, is unlikely to be able to yield the Doklam area to China. If Bhutan, as expected, gives the non-Doklam areas in its western border area to China, China in return is likely to give up its claims only to areas it has claimed but not annexed (c. 353 sq kms in the Upper Langmarpo, Charitang, and Yak chu areas in the west and c. 78 sq kms in the Chagdzom area in the north-east). It is also likely to return to Bhutan an area of some 147 sq kms that it has occupied but in which it has not built villages or relocated settlers (the Pagsamlung valley).

## **In summary:**

- China now has constructed 22 villages and settlements within Bhutan's customary borders, of which 19 are villages and three are small settlements.
- Seven of these cross-border villages and settlements have been constructed since early 2023, signalling a marked increase in the speed and extent of construction in the annexed areas.
- Three of the 19 villages are going to be upgraded to towns.
- It looks increasingly certain that China will not fulfil its original offer to give back to Bhutan the land in Bhutan's north-east where it has built villages.
- Bhutan is likely to get back only those areas which China appears to have claimed or annexed largely as leverage and to give the subsequent appearance of concessions.
- China's cross-border village strategy sets a problematic precedent for the international community, since there is no obvious counter for a small state acting alone in response to opportunistic territorial claims and subsequent annexation by a major power.

## The report also finds that:

- One of the major areas of Bhutan that China has occupied by building roads and setting up military outposts there – the Pagsamlung valley, which is an area of major religious importance to Bhutan – is not disputed territory. Although some local-level Chinese maps show it as part of China, China has marked the valley on its national-level maps as part of Bhutan for at least the last 25 years. It has annexed it anyway.
- Unnoticed even within the country, Bhutan has already given up one area to China: the Menchuma valley and the Menchuma plateau. Until the early 2000s, this area was declared by Bhutan to be part of its territory. It is now no longer shown as part of Bhutan on official Bhutanese maps (see Fig. 12).
- All the villages built by China within Bhutan's customary borders are linked by roads to Chinese towns, but not to Bhutanese ones.
- The 22 cross-border villages and settlements are at an average altitude of 3,832m above sea level (asl). Ten are at sites over 4,000m asl. The highest village, Menchuma, is on an exposed mountain ridge at 4,670m asl.
- The cross-border villages and settlements are all located in high-altitude narrow valleys or on steep slopes or high ridges where normal rural livelihoods – agriculture and animal husbandry – are difficult or impossible. As a result, local governments have to go to extraordinary lengths to persuade relocatees to move to the villages and to provide potential sources of income for the residents.
- Climatic conditions at the village sites in most cases are not conducive for year-round residence, with many of the villages blocked off by snow for four months or more each winter, and only getting 70 days of sunlight a year. Non-essential residents have to be transferred from some villages during the winter months.
- Settlers who relocate, voluntarily or otherwise, to the cross-border villages generally get a basic annual subsidy of 20,000 yuan (c US\$2,836) per person. This is equivalent to the average annual per capita income of rural residents of the Tibet Autonomous Region (19,924 yuan) in 2023, and only just below the national average per capita rural income for China that year (21,692 yuan).
- All of the villages of which details are known have been built by Chinese or Tibetan construction companies under contract to local Chinese administrations. Each village has an average of 120 households. Based on official data for four villages, the average construction cost of a cross-border village, including housing, water supply, drainage, and sewage, is 884,000 yuan (c. US\$20,000) per household. Additional sums are needed for the infrastructure needed for each village, including roads, connectivity, power supplies, water supplies, health services, social services, administration buildings, industrial and commercial spaces, schools or kindergartens, and other facilities.
- Images published in official Chinese media reports show residents, including children and the elderly, in at least nine of the cross-border villages. These appear to be close to full occupancy. Information about the settlement rate in other villages has not yet been made public.
- Social media postings, blogs, videos and comments by Chinese tourists and unofficial online commentators in China openly celebrate what they see as China's "recovery" of these villages and their surrounding areas from Bhutan. Official Chinese media reports and academic articles never indicate that these villages are in disputed territory, let alone that they are within Bhutan's customary borders.

- The eight villages built by China in the western sector of Bhutan and five of the 14 villages and settlements in the north-eastern sector have strategic or security functions, since they provide oversight of border passes and of valleys that lead to or from Bhutan.
- Nine of the villages and settlements built by China in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan, including all those built since early 2023, appear to have no strategic or security functions and are superfluous to China's policy of coercive diplomacy or compellence directed at Bhutan. China's purpose in building them is unclear.
- There has been minimal coverage by the international media, other than in India, of China's land appropriation in areas of Bhutan. Apart from two brief denials by the Bhutanese government, one denial by the Chinese media, and two informational reports issued by the US military in 2023 and 2024, no government or government agency has made any statement or reference to the land appropriation or village-building programmes. This is likely to have been a factor in the acceleration of construction by China since 2023 in the annexed areas and may be seen as confirming the costless benefits of this grey-zone strategy.

## Methodology

The report draws on the combination of methodologies and resources that we used in our initial research in 2020-21 into China's overall cross-border village programme in Bhutan. That methodology was based on applying the various forms of ethnographic familiarity, ground knowledge, linguistic ability, historical knowledge and political experience in our team to the analysis and interpretation of open-source texts published by the official Chinese media in Tibet. We then supplemented and tested initial findings by drawing on techniques of geospatial OSINT (open-source intelligence), as well as on aspects of international relations and policy studies. Interdisciplinary approaches of this kind are of particular relevance at a time when conventional certainties about sovereignty, borders, conflict, diplomacy and spheres of influence are under stress, especially in the context of grey-zone conflict and lawfare. This combined approach enabled us to unearth the early stages of this instance of territorial expansion that at that time had gone largely unnoticed on the global stage, and we have since used a similar method to study the ongoing development of that program.

In the work for this report, we had additional assistance from Planet Lab, which supplied analytical data that identified locations and dates of new construction between 2019 and November 2023 in certain of the border areas. This material contained c.700 data points, mostly located in areas within China's recognised borders. We manually assessed these data points against a list of 140 border villages within Tibet (China) that we had compiled through manual searches. Muyi Xiao of *The New York Times*' visual investigation team generously shared her list of border villages with us. We excluded data-points that were already on our manual search list or *The Times* list, or that indicated construction in existing towns or isolated construction in existing villages, or that were not within 30 kms of the border. We then grouped the remaining data points into 78 "points of interest" (PoI), according to the size of each cluster. This produced 8 "large" Poles, 14 "medium" Poles, and 56 "small" ones. We checked these against current images provided by Planet Lab or those available online from ESRI World Imagery Wayback, which are often current up to late 2023. As a result, we were able to identify four of the eight "large" Poles and seven of the 14

"medium" Poles as previously unknown new or upgraded border villages, as well as two military sites, all of which were within China's recognised borders. We also were able to identify a number of potentially significant construction sites at smaller Poles.

We then used the analytics data to identify the dates of initial construction work at each site in the cross-border areas. We used a similar process to identify the dates of new road construction in these border areas, based again on analytics data supplied by Planet Lab. We matched this data against near-daily images available online from Copernicus (Sentinel Hub), which are generally current to within 5-10 days, cloud cover permitting. Public images from Copernicus (Sentinel) are very low resolution, but can be compiled into time-lapse videos from 2016 to the present day in which show the beginning of any major construction work is usually visible, though again only on the relatively infrequent days without major cloud cover.

For geolocation of major sites, we took photographs published in official Chinese media reports about named villages. We then compared landscape, architectural or other features in those images, where possible, with satellite images available from Google Earth, Planet Lab or, in particular, ESRI World Imagery Wayback. This allowed us to establish the location of the villages officially referred to as Jiwu, Chamapu, Semalong and, by deduction, Qujielong.

We discovered the most recent of the 22 cross-border villages and settlements – which we have called Semalong 3 – from a single image supplied by Planet Lab in August 2024. In all cases we also cross-checked our findings with the detailed – but unofficial – work done by unknown crowd-mappers on Open Street Maps (also shown on ESRI Rapid Earth and sites such as mapy.cz), which often supplied important if unconfirmed information.

We found in general that research relying primarily on technological tools is prone to errors and confirmation bias, often in substantial ways, and so in all cases based all our hypotheses and findings primarily on applying local knowledge, previous fieldwork, historical records, ethnographic findings to open-source documents, using technological tools only to confirm or discount hypotheses.

# Part 1: Introduction

A cross-border village (CBV) is a settlement that has been constructed by one state in territory generally understood to belong to another state. In most cases, the village-constructing state has previously made a claim to ownership of that territory, so that technically that area can be described as disputed territory. In the case of China, the construction of CBVs has occurred in areas that have been shown for decades on official Bhutanese maps as part of Bhutan and that have, until recently, been controlled and administered by Bhutan. China does not acknowledge in any of its official media reports that these areas are or have ever been part of Bhutan. Instead, it says simply that these areas are part of China and does not refer to them in public as disputed. However, much of the territory where China has now built CBVs was shown until the early 1990s as part of Bhutanese territory even on many of China's own maps.

China began construction of its first known CBV in 2016. That village, known in Chinese as Jieliobu or in Tibetan as Gyalaphug or Cheliphug,<sup>4</sup> is in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan. Since then, China has constructed a total of 11 villages and three small settlements in north-eastern Bhutan and eight villages in areas generally understood as parts of western Bhutan.

In Chinese media reports, these villages are described using the same terms as are applied to the hundreds of other villages recently built by China in areas close to, but within, its borders. These terms include “close-to-the-border relocation villages” (*dibian banqian cun*), “well-off border villages” (*bianjing xiaokang cun*), or, more generally, “close-to-the-border new villages” (*dibian xincun*).<sup>5</sup> The CBVs are thus never identified as different or exceptional in terms of location, legal status, political significance or any other factor.

## A Chinese CBV in India-claimed territory

There is one case of a village constructed by China in 2021 in territory claimed by India. This village has been named by China as “Luoba (Lhoba) New Village”. It has been built in territory that was seized from Indian control by Chinese troops in 1959 in the run-up to the 1962 Indo-Chinese war. China has retained full control of that area since then. In legal and practical terms, the case of Luoba New Village thus differs from the CBVs in Bhutan, since the latter are in territory that China had never previously controlled and had not gained through an act of war. As a result, the case of Luoba New Village, while it has clearly been constructed in disputed territory, is not considered in this report.

Some Indian media outlets have described a second Chinese village, Qionglin (Tib: Khyungling) in Menling county, Nyingtri municipality, as having been built in Indian, i.e., disputed, territory. However, this is based on an error in the marking of the Indian claim line on the official Survey of India map for that area. That line should run along the watershed 6kms to the south-east of Qionglin, but is shown mistakenly at that point as running 1km to its north (see Kyang Thang, November 20, 2021, [https://x.com/Kyangs\\_Thang/status/1461908420857106434](https://x.com/Kyangs_Thang/status/1461908420857106434)). Qionglin is a newly improved village very close to the border, but it is not in disputed territory.

The CBVs in Bhutan have been constructed by China despite it having signed an agreement with Bhutan in 1998 in which it “agreed that prior to the ultimate solution of the boundary issues, peace and tranquillity along the border should be maintained and the status quo of the boundary prior to March 1959 should be upheld.” In that agreement, both sides undertook “not to resort to unilateral action to alter the status quo of the border.”<sup>6</sup> The construction of CBVs by China followed a series of representations to China by Bhutan over several years concerning alleged breaches by China of its commitments made in that agreement.<sup>7</sup>

This paper, drawing largely on Bhutanese parliamentary proceedings, Chinese media reports and satellite imagery, presents a survey of current information about these villages, together with the main data about the villages, their location, size and purposes.<sup>8</sup> This information includes details of seven cross-border villages or settlements that have been shown in images published in overseas media but not previously described or named (Gangbatang, Majiatang new village, Semalong, Semalong 2, Qujielong and Demalong 2), and four new villages that have not been previously shown or reported (Lower Minjuma and Semalong 3 in the north-east of Bhutan, and Banggala and Qulei South-east in the west).

Analysis of satellite images made available for this report suggests that the 19 villages and three settlements built by China in Bhutan currently contain approximately 752 residential blocks or buildings. These blocks are subdivided into an estimated 2,284 residential units, each suitable for one family-sized unit. Assuming an average of three people in each household or unit,<sup>9</sup> this would suggest that since 2016 around 7,000 people, or approximately 360 people in each village, have been moved or are currently being moved by the Chinese authorities into these previously unpopulated areas of what is widely understood to be Bhutan. At a very rough estimate, judging from available photographs (see Fig. 5), each major CBV is likely to have as temporary residents between 50 and 100 officials, construction workers, border police and soldiers at any one time.

## Background: Border Negotiations

China inherited Tibet's border with Bhutan in 1951 when, following the advance of the Chinese army into central Tibet, the Tibetan government signed a surrender agreement with Beijing in which, in effect, it ceded the entirety of its territory to China. This created a border of some 477 kms between Bhutan and China. Since that time, China and Bhutan have failed to reach an agreement on that border, making Bhutan one of only two countries (the other is India) among China's 14 neighbours that still has an undemarcated border with China.

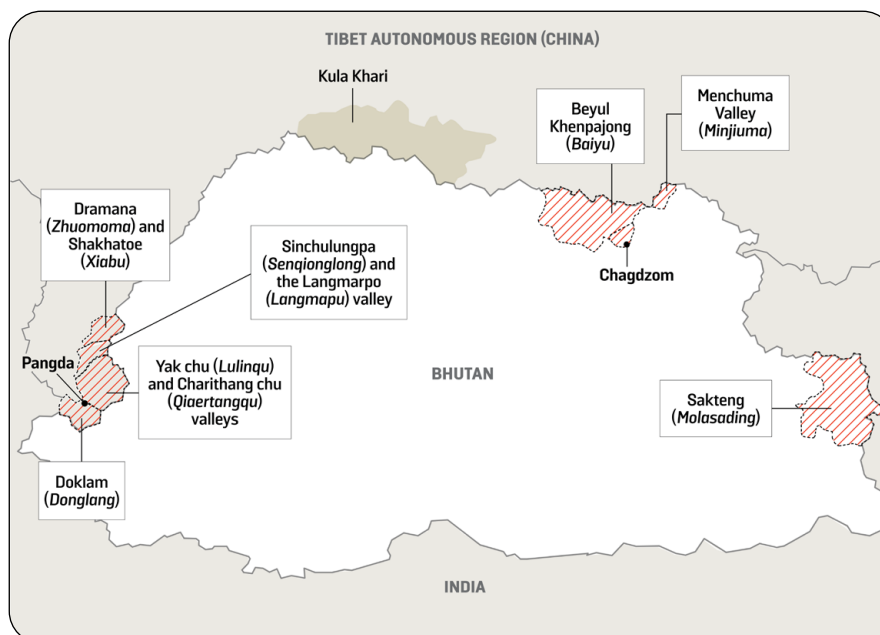
Since acquiring Tibet in the 1950s, China has claimed a number of areas that are or were considered by Bhutan to be parts of its territory. Some of these areas have already been ceded by Bhutan to China (see "Concessions by Bhutan", below), most notably the northern area known as Kula Khari.<sup>10</sup> This leaves three main sectors which China is currently claiming from Bhutan:

- Sakteng in the eastern sector of Bhutan, a claim which China raised publicly in 2020 but appears not to be actively pursuing<sup>11</sup>
- the Beyul triple-valley and the Menchuma area in the north-eastern sector
- the Doklam plateau and seven adjacent valleys (the mid-Amo chu, Torsa nala, Yak, Charitang, Langmarpo, Dramana and Shakhatoe) in the western sector.

China's CBV construction has been taking place in the latter two sectors of Bhutan – the north-east and the west.

China's CBV construction program is an integral component of its negotiations with Bhutan concerning their respective border claims, which in turn are bound up with China's declared goal of persuading Bhutan to allow China to open an embassy in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan.<sup>13</sup> Despite not yet having formal diplomatic ties, China and Bhutan have held 25 rounds of talks on the border question since 1984, as well as numerous other joint meetings and site inspections of a technical nature. In 1990, at the seventh round of these negotiations,<sup>14</sup> China proposed what has come to be known as the "package deal". According to this deal, Beijing would withdraw its claims in the north-east of Bhutan if Thimphu would agree to cede certain of the areas that China claims in Bhutan's western sector. According to the official Bhutanese account, the deal means that China would relinquish its claim to 495 sq kms in the Beyul in the north-east if Bhutan yields 269 sq kms of land in the west, including the Doklam plateau and the nearby areas of Sinchulungpa, Dramana and Shakhatoe (see Table 1).

To obtain the Doklam plateau would be a significant gain for China, since the southern ridge (the Zompelri) at Doklam provides oversight of the strategically sensitive Siliguri corridor linking mainland India to its north-east provinces. Access to the ridge by China would create a serious vulnerability for India in its on-going military confrontations with China.



[Fig. 1. Shaded areas from left: Western sector (Haa dzongkhag/Yadong county); Kula Khari (Gasa dzongkhag), ceded by Bhutan to China in the 1980s; Beyul and Menchuma (Lhuentse dzong/Lhodrag county) in the north-eastern sector; Sakteng (Trashigang and Samdrub Jongkhar dzongkhags) in the eastern sector. Source: Foreign Policy/Robert Barnett 2021.]<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1: Areas claimed by China (sq. kms.)<sup>15</sup>**

Chinese names (unofficial reports, 2023)	Under actual control	Claimed but not controlled ("no reports")	Dzongkha names (2002 announcement by King to the National Assembly)	Disputed areas
South west sector	Under Xiayadong township in Yadong county		Under Bji gewog in Haa dzongkhag	
Jiwu	83		Shakhatoe, Gieu, Gi'u	138
Upper Chamapu 查马普 (查马浦)*	27		Dramana*	
Mid Langmapu 朗马普 (朗玛浦)	42		Sinchulungpa	42
Lower Langmapu				
Upper Langmapu		38	Upper Langmarpo**	[not known]
Qia'ertang 恰尔塘		89	Charitang**	[not known]
Lulin 鲁林		226	Yak chu**	[not known]
Donglang 洞朗	58	31	Doklam	89
Kangbumaqu 康布麻曲, Zhuomomaqu 卓莫麻曲, Chunbiqu 春丕河, Yadongqu 亚东河			Amo chu/Torsa chu	[not known]
Totals:	210	384		269
North sector	Under Lajiao (Lagyab) and Lagang (Lhakhang) townships in Luozha (Lhodrag) county***		Under Kurtog gewog in Lhuentse dzongkhag****	
Jigenong 吉格弄	413		Jakarlung (Benzraguru chu, Yurgang chu, Kur chu)	
Basangnong 巴桑弄	147		Pagsamlung (Yarigang chu, Yangrigang chu))	
Minjiama 民玖玛	55		Menchuma	
Totals:	615			495
Grand total	825	384		664

\* The Chinese name Chamapu is often used to refer to the Dramana river valley or to part of it, although the Dzongkha name Charmarpo (Brag dmar po) refers to a part of the Upper Langmarpo. Sinchulungpa is the name of a small plateau at the source of the Upper Langmarpo river, but the term is also used loosely for mid-section of that valley.

\*\* The Bhutanese authorities have not publicly recognised the Upper Langmarpo, Charitang, and Yak areas as disputed. China has claimed these areas but has not settled or occupied them.

\*\*\* There are no clear delimitations of these areas. Official Chinese maps show multiple conflicting claims and redefinitions of its claims in this sector.

\*\*\*\* It is unclear if Bhutan is including Menchuma as a disputed area.

Note that this list does not include China's on-off claim to Sakteng, which covers 3,300 sq. kms., according to Chinese sources, and 650 sq km according to other sources.

In 1995, there were indications that the Bhutanese king, who at that time headed the Bhutanese government, regarded the Chinese “package deal” favourably and was expecting Bhutan to accept it.<sup>16</sup> However, Bhutan subsequently delayed reaching any settlement with China and in 2001 submitted a revised and expanded claim,<sup>17</sup> setting back progress on the talks. The Chinese side indicated discontent with this development, which it blamed on Indian interference. Commentators, including the prominent Bhutanese journalist Tenzing Lamsang,<sup>18</sup> also said that Bhutan’s decision not to proceed with the Chinese proposal was due to pressure from India not to cede the Doklam plateau to China. If so, this was pressure that Bhutan could not refuse, since it is required by treaties signed in 1949 and 2007 to respect India’s security concerns.<sup>19</sup>

China’s CBV construction program constituted the most substantive and assertive part of China’s response to Bhutan’s failure to accept the “package deal” in the mid-1990s. The CBVs were thus an extreme form of what is sometimes called “coercive diplomacy”, or, more accurately, compellence:<sup>20</sup> they were openly a signal to Bhutan that it would permanently lose all the territories claimed by China unless it agreed to China’s proposed exchange.

## **The Purpose of the CBVs: (1) Security**

The purpose of China’s cross-border construction programme has sometimes been described as alleviating poverty by relocating impoverished villagers to new locations.<sup>21</sup> Poverty alleviation was indeed part of the rationale for China’s programme for the “Construction of Well-off Villages in the Border Areas” of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).<sup>22</sup> That program led to the building or re-naming of over 600 villages in the TAR as “moderately well-off border villages” between 2017 and 2020.<sup>23</sup> However, in official statements about the border village programme in the TAR, its economic purposes are described as secondary to security considerations. This is indicated by Xi Jinping’s canonical comment on its aims: “In August 2020 ... General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: ‘We must strengthen the construction of border areas, adopt special support policies, and help border residents improve their production and living conditions and solve their worries’”.<sup>24</sup> In July 2021, a meeting on “Regional Border Defence” in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) concluded that “strengthening border defence is the primary task” and “people’s livelihood is not only related to the people’s hearts and cohesion, but also closely linked to ‘fully defending the country’s territorial integrity’, ‘ensuring social stability in border areas’, and ‘continuously strengthening the strength of defending the land and consolidating the border’”.<sup>25</sup>

As for the CBV construction programme, which involves 3.5% of the “moderately well-off border villages” in the TAR, economic improvement is clearly not its purpose. Its aim is to ensure that these villages function as security perimeters for China and as tools in its assertion of sovereignty over certain neighbouring territories. If poverty alleviation were the purpose of the CBV construction program, or even of China’s general border policy in Tibet, the inhabitants of border villages would have been relocated, at far less expense, to areas close to major towns where they would have natural economic opportunities and to areas where climatic and infrastructural conditions are suitable for all-year residence.<sup>26</sup>

The main security function of border villages in general, including CBVs, relates, according to official sources, to their role in bolstering China's border defences. Besides providing logistical support for police and military units stationed along the border, the residents of border villages serve as what the Chinese state calls "guardians of the sacred land". They are required to join groups known as "Joint Defence Teams" which, together with border police and troops, carry out border patrols. The teams also plant Chinese flags along the border and spray-paint the word "China" in Chinese on prominent rocks and surfaces. In some parts of the TAR, border village residents have been given positions as "professional border residents", also referred to as "border consolidation teams", who apparently carry out patrols as a job.<sup>27</sup> Local residents have a particular significance in these roles because they are almost all Tibetans and so are adapted to the altitude, unlike police or soldiers who are often ethnic Chinese.

The claim that the CBVs in Bhutan have a significant security function is questionable. There is no evidence of any threats to China or its borders coming from Bhutan. Bhutan has only 8,000 members in its security forces, its military posture is largely token, that posture is purely defensive, and the size of its military units in the border areas is negligible.<sup>28</sup> The terrain in all the relevant areas is extremely

mountainous and sometimes near impassable, and there are no roads in those areas on the Bhutanese side. Even India's military has shown a purely reactive posture in the Bhutan sector, intervening only when Chinese troops attempted in 2017 to gain access to the southern ridge of the Doklam plateau.

The only security issue on the border between Bhutan and Tibet (now China) identified by Chinese sources involves Tibetans trying to escape from Tibet or trying to enter Tibet unnoticed, usually after returning from some time in exile. "To prevent illegal immigrants from entering and leaving the country" has been described in Chinese official media as "the most important task of border guarding".<sup>29</sup> From the early 1980s until 2008, when China significantly strengthened patrols along the southern Tibetan border, 2–3,000 Tibetans fled across the Himalayas each year, according to figures provided at the time by the UNHCR and the exile Tibetan authorities. However, those escapes and the very small number of reported attempts by former Tibetan escapees to return furtively to Tibet across those borders all involved Tibetans crossing the border with Nepal. There are almost no accounts of Tibetans trying to cross the Indian or Bhutanese borders in either direction without official papers. An official Chinese report in 2021 indicated only three cases of illegal border-crossing a year on average since 2003 in one stretch of the border with Nepal.<sup>30</sup>



[Fig. 2. A police officer from an anti-terrorist squad based in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa demonstrates to members of the Joint Defence Team in Jieliubu how to handle would-be escapees and illegal border-crossers, December 16, 2020. The police officer was stationed in Jieliubu as a member of the village-resident cadre work team. Credit: 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha), the Weixin channel of the Lhodrag County Party Committee Office via the Jieliubu Village-Resident Task Force, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/EOYhp2CQtER5v2-aIXKyA>]

By 2020, the number of Tibetans reported to have fled from Tibet without official papers had dropped to single figures even across the Nepalese border.<sup>31</sup>

This suggests that, while CBVs certainly offer security advantages to China as observational posts and in terms of logistical support and patrols, the villages (as opposed to forward military bases and outposts in the newly-annexed areas) are more or less marginal to China's defence or security needs along the Bhutan border. The mobilising of patrols in border areas of Bhutan and the training of border residents as security guards appears to be largely performative, intended not to catch fictive border-crossers but to encourage patriotic emotions among resettled Tibetan villagers. This fits with the overall shift in China to an intensified policy focus on border areas immediately after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012–13. That shift followed calls from 2010 onwards by a number of Chinese policy advisers for a radical change in China's policy for border areas, which was said to have encouraged ethnic difference at the cost of national security.<sup>32</sup> Initially this was to be achieved through accelerating economic development in those areas. However, as two influential Tibet advisors wrote, the new border policy should not just focus on improving the economy of border areas, or on their role as security barriers, but should also "strengthen the national consciousness and identity of border residents". This was needed, they argued, because

*"the '[local] nationality consciousness' of our border residents is often greater than their 'national consciousness'. Their sense of [national] identity and belonging is not strong, and their awareness of the importance of territories and borders is relatively weak. This provides opportunities for...foreign hostile forces and ultra-nationalist thoughts to infiltrate our country's border areas. Therefore, we must pay close attention to the cultural development of the border areas, pay attention to and guide public opinion, and improve the 'national consciousness' of the border people".<sup>33</sup>*

The ideological improvement of border residents thus seems to have been an important reason for the emphasis on the security role of border villages and on the requirement that border residents work as border guards even when the objective need would appear to be almost entirely theoretical. At the same time, the widespread publicity given by China's media to these village patrols by Tibetan border residents must serve also to promote patriotic feeling among Chinese citizens in general.

## The Purpose of CBVs: (2) The Six Stages of Sovereignty-Assertion

The CBVs and their residents may not play a major role in conventional security terms, but they have a very significant role in China's territorial relations with Bhutan. Unlike the hundreds of border villages that are within China's borders, the CBVs function as a device for asserting sovereignty over territories beyond China's normal borders, both through their physical presence and their putative legal significance. In particular, the CBVs represent the final stage in what has been China's long-term strategy for acquiring territories from Bhutan.

China's approach to acquiring territories from its neighbour has involved six stages. Those stages have run in parallel with diplomatic moves. At each stage China first appears to have made a formal request to the Bhutanese government through diplomatic channels asserting or repeating a claim to a particular segment of Bhutanese territory. When Bhutan failed to respond as requested regarding a given claim, or in some cases even before it responded to a negotiating request,<sup>34</sup> China initiated the next stage of its sovereignty-assertion strategy,<sup>35</sup> until all six stages were completed.

These stages started with claims to territory in Bhutan by local Tibetan pastoralists (who are now Chinese citizens) based in many cases on historic or customary grazing rights. These claims derived from the traditional practice of cross-border grazing by herders from either side of the border, which was a standard feature of herding life throughout the Himalayas until China's takeover of Tibet in the 1950s. When these claims were not accepted by the Bhutanese government, Tibetan herders were sent temporarily from the Chinese side with their herds into the disputed areas during summer grazing seasons.<sup>36</sup> This led to conflicts with Bhutanese herders using the same pasturelands. In some cases, this action was followed by the Tibetan herders demanding that the Bhutanese pay taxes to them in return for being allowed to graze their animals in that area.<sup>37</sup>

The second stage typically included the construction of huts or shelters by the Tibetan herders.<sup>38</sup> In 1995, this stage took a much more significant form when four Tibetan herders in the Beyul were sent to overwinter in a disputed area for the first time (they remained there for the next 30 years). Since diplomatic negotiations had still not resolved the dispute, the Chinese strategy then moved to a third stage, which involved sending military or joint military-civilian teams to carry out foot patrols in the claimed area, ostensibly to protect the herders. This stage included the creation of mule tracks by herders.<sup>39</sup> The fourth stage involved the construction of “duty points” (zhiqin dian 执勤点) in the claimed areas, a term used for military or police posts or checkpoints. These were often housed in temporary structures such as tents, lean-tos or improvised shelters. Some duty points were later upgraded to outposts (qianshao 前哨), which are permanent structures.<sup>40</sup> Fifthly, from around 2004, since a diplomatic agreement had still not been reached, workers were sent, generally with military protection, to carry out road construction in all or some of the claimed areas.<sup>41</sup>



[Fig. 3. A screengrab from a December 2020 video shows Sonam Choephel (left) and Mingyur Tashi, the oldest of the four Tibetan herders sent to live permanently in the Beyul in 1995, outside the shack at Mabjathang where they lived for two decades. Credit: TAR Internet Information Office. URL: [http://news.xhby.net/tuijian/202101/t20210120\\_6954173.shtml](http://news.xhby.net/tuijian/202101/t20210120_6954173.shtml).]

From 2016 onwards, these steps were followed by a sixth stage: the construction of a village in each of the areas actively claimed by China. A number of Chinese citizens were then relocated or are currently being relocated to the village as permanent residents. At the same time an administrative apparatus was established in that village, together with police (and in some cases military) units. Because the villages are at high altitude, posing problems for ethnic Chinese settlers, the relocatees are almost always Tibetans. An official order from the TAR government in 2023 advised that relocatees should include former members of the military.<sup>42</sup>

These six forms or degrees of sovereignty assertion were spaced out over two to three decades and took place at different times in different border areas. Some of these steps, and the difficulties they caused for Bhutanese herders at the local level, are described in statements made by Bhutanese representatives from border areas at their country's annual National Assembly from 1995 onwards. Their statements illustrate the differing types of incursion into Bhutanese border areas by herders, soldiers, officials and construction workers from across the Chinese/Tibetan border.<sup>43</sup> However, since 2007, detailed summaries of Bhutan's National Assembly sessions have not been made public or have not included discussions of border incursions.



[Fig. 4. The “Demalong No. 7 duty point of the Lajiao Border Police Station”, guarded by a police officer from the National Immigration Administration. The location is given by the source as 27.94984° N, 91.03087° E. Date and photographer not known. Source: @Peter168, April 29, 2023, <https://x.com/peter16813/status/1652432685401530368/photo/1>.]

**Table 2. Stages of Incremental Sovereignty Assertion**

Type of sovereignty-assertion action; secondary actions; year of a typical incident report of such an action by representatives to the National Assembly of Bhutan or in the media				
Stage	Primary action	Secondary action	Year of typical report	Unofficial Chinese descriptors
Stage 1	Cross-border grazing by Tibetan herders	Demanding taxes from Bhutanese herders	1993	
Stage 2	Constructing huts, shelters	Overwintering	1995	
Stage 3	Military foot-patrols	Constructing mule tracks	1999	"Patrol actual control"
Stage 4	"Duty points" (improvised outposts, tents and huts)	Permanent outposts		"Patrol and outpost actual control"
Stage 5	Roads	Roadworking teams and camps	2004	"Outpost and road actual control"
Stage 6	Villages	Settlers, administrative agencies, military bases	2016	"Administrative actual control"

The completion of village construction in these areas, according to unofficial Chinese commentators who specialise in China's border claims, represents the achievement by China of "administrative actual control" in those areas.<sup>44</sup> This is said to give China the right to sovereignty over that territory on the basis of effective possession.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of building CBVs is, primarily, to assert this right in the pursuit of a sovereignty claim.<sup>46</sup>

Disputed areas in Bhutan are accordingly divided by unofficial online Chinese commentators into five main categories. The first consists of areas where an area is claimed by China but has no known Chinese presence, and where Chinese troops are not conducting patrols, or are not known to be doing so. This is termed a "no reports area". A second type of area consists of a territory claimed by China where its presence is limited to patrols by Chinese troops or military-civilian teams. These are "patrol actual control" areas. The third category describes areas where the Chinese have constructed military outposts, but not roads. The fourth is an area in which roads have been constructed, making it an "area under outpost and road actual control". The fifth type of area, according to this scheme, is one where China has built a CBV, turning it into an "area under administrative actual control".

The primary purpose of a CBV is thus to provide support for a claim by China to sovereignty of a disputed area. However, in the case of Bhutan this purpose has taken two entirely different forms. In the western

sector of Bhutan, where China has built eight CBVs, they serve as what China calls a "consolidating" or "fixing" role. That is, the villages actualise China's sovereignty by creating "facts on the ground". In this function, the land-based CBVs have a similar role to the artificial islands constructed by China in the South China Seas. There is no intention or realistic possibility that those villages or the land around them will ever be given up by China and returned to another party. But the villages and settlements in the north-east of Bhutan have a very different function. They were not apparently intended to aid China in the permanent acquisition of that territory. Instead, they were intended to signal to Bhutan that it should to yield its sovereignty over the western border tracts. They thus represented what seemed to be a temporary occupation of Bhutanese soil by China as an unusually extreme form of what in international relations theory is known as compellence, but which in this case is closer to a forceful threat. However, as we shall see, since at least early 2023, possibly as a result of international non-responsiveness to the initial occupation, the role of the north-eastern CBVs has changed.

## Design and Definition of Villages

We have termed groups of less than ten buildings as settlements, not villages. Where we found images showing a set of ten or more buildings, we had to assess if this was a distinct village or a sub-unit within a larger village. This is difficult in the case of CBVs because nearly half of China's CBVs in Bhutan are village clusters – that is, each such village consists of a number of subsidiary villages in close proximity, either arranged in a line along the banks of a river in a narrow valley or grouped together where the valley floor is wider. China has only published official information about five of the CBVs in Bhutan – those that are classified as higher-level villages. These are classified as an “administrative village” (*xingzhengcun*), a “community” (*shequ*), “community neighbourhood committee” (*shequ juweihui*) or a “village villagers committee” (*cun cunmin weiyuanhui*). These are identified on official lists published annually by China's National Statistical Bureau<sup>47</sup> or similar websites carrying official geographic information. There are no public lists of lower-level villages in China, which are often termed “natural villages” (*zirancun*) or “village groups” (*cunzu* or *zu*). For the purposes of this report, we have not considered the subsidiary villages within a village cluster to be separate villages. Instead, we have treated a group of buildings as a distinct village rather than a subset or sector within a larger village if it has ten or more buildings and if:

- it is further than 400m from the next nearest group of buildings and
- it has a central building, indicating administrative or community offices or facilities<sup>48</sup>

or if:

- it is separated from the neighbouring structures or village by a distinct geographic feature such as a river
- it is visibly different in lay-out from the neighbouring structures
- it was built at a different time from the neighbouring structures and
- it has a central building.

Using this classification scheme, as of September 2024, we have identified 19 distinct villages in the cross-border areas and three smaller settlements. Eight of these villages are clusters composed of two to four subsidiary villages in close proximity, while the 11 others are single villages.<sup>49</sup> Within the eight clusters, we identified 19 subsidiary villages or sectors, which we have not counted as separate villages. Of these, at least seven already have their own central building and so might be named later by the Chinese administration as separate administrative units. Others, which could not be clearly viewed from available imagery or are still under construction, may acquire a central building soon and may turn out to be classified by the Chinese authorities as separate villages. If all subsidiary villages are counted as distinct villages, the total number of CBVs within customary Bhutan is 38.

The central building in a village is usually two storeys or more in height and often taller than the residential blocks in the village. This building is the “The Party-and-Masses Benefit Activity Centre” which every village in China has been required to include since the start of the Xi Jinping era. It is usually on a raised concrete platform or plinth, generally with a distinctive white surface. Chinese media photographs of at least six CBVs (Jieluobu, Minjuma, Pangda, Langmapu, Chamapu and Semalong) and unofficial videos of Demalong show such a building with its signboard in each of these villages.<sup>50</sup> Every village in China also has to have a “New Era Civilisation Practice Centre”, which is usually housed within the “The Party-and-Masses Benefit Activity Centre” rather than in a separate building. These “Activity Centres” provide facilities for meetings of the local branch (Chinese: *zhibu*; Tibetan: *tri bu*) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), village committee meetings, political education sessions, lessons in the “national common language”, cultural events, regular flag-raising ceremonies, and other activities. Most villages include additional buildings in or beside the central square, providing public facilities such as a kindergarten or additional government offices.

All the new villages in the cross-border areas, like the other 609 or more “well-off border villages” completed within the borders of the TAR since 2017, are arranged in a geometrical or grid-type layout, with parallel rows of residential blocks surrounding or beside one or more public buildings. In total, using aerial imagery and photographs in Chinese media publications, we identified 735 residential blocks in the 19 villages and 17 in the three settlements, a total of 752 blocks. On average, each village consists of 38 residential blocks plus three central or public buildings, and each settlement consists of five residential blocks.

The residential blocks in these CBVs and settlements are not like the standard Soviet-style dormitory-type accommodation found throughout China and Tibet up until the 1990s. Instead, they are only one or two storeys high and are designed in a uniform and relatively appealing faux-Tibetan style.

Each of the residential blocks is subdivided into a number of individual housing units arranged side-by-side, with an average of three units in each block. Each unit has a separate doorway and in some cases has a courtyard. In many cases, such as at Jiwu (Caitangga), the courtyards are roofed. Generally, the homes face to the south or south west, an essential feature for living conditions in the Himalayas, but in Qujielong and Demalong, the buildings face west, which may significantly reduce access to sunlight in those homes. The largest village in the western sector, Jiwu, has 330 units, while the largest among the north-eastern CBVs is Semalong, with 174 units.

As far as can be judged from satellite imagery, the 752 residential blocks in the 22 villages and settlements contain in total approximately 2,284 residential units. Of these, 1,035 units are in the northern sector and 1,249 are in the western sector, with an average of 91 homes or units per village in the north-eastern CBVs and 156 in the western ones. If we assume an average of three people in each unit or household, this would suggest a potential population of around 7,000, or approximately 360 people per village, in the annexed areas of Bhutan.



[Fig. 5. The villagers, cadres, construction workers, police and military team stationed at Jieliubu salute the Chinese national flag and sing the national anthem during the ceremony to mark the 71st anniversary of the founding of the PRC, October 1, 2020. Found at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/EOYhp2CQtER5v2-alXKyA> (original source) Source of image and text : Jieliubu Village Resident Task Force, published in 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha), the Weixin channel of the Lhodrag County Party Committee Office (luozhaxcb@126.com). Image date: October 1, 2020.]



[Fig. 6. A residential building in “faux-Tibetan” style at the Jiwu (Caitangga) Relocation Site in western Bhutan. Screengrab from a video. Date and photographer not known. Source: @Peter168, May 6, 2023, <https://x.com/peter16813/status/1654806654985318401>.]

## Infrastructure, Facilities and Village Life

Building the houses in each village is only one element of border village construction. As with all of the 628 or more “well-off border villages” in the TAR, the government requires extensive infrastructure to be put in place to make normal life possible in each CBV. That infrastructure consists of an administrative structure, physical and technological facilities, and an economic or income-generating system. In terms of administration and personnel, all the villages have temporary populations of soldiers, officials and construction workers. The soldiers and construction workers in the villages are usually ethnic Chinese, as far as one can judge from photographs and from references to them in the media.<sup>51</sup> The officials generally include both Chinese and Tibetans; the latter are essential for translation purposes.

The officials are stationed in each administrative village, and possibly in other villages too, as members of the “village-resident cadre work team” assigned to that village. The work team members are seconded from higher-level offices, typically from county towns or, in the case of Jieliubu even from Lhasa, to serve in the villages on one year or one-and-a-half year rotations. They are far higher in status and authority than local officials, who would only be at township level.

The residents of each village in theory select individuals from among the villagers to serve as the Party Secretary, Deputy Party Secretary and Committee Members of the “Party Branch Committee” formed in each village. They also serve as the leaders or members of the nominal “village committee” in each village, which nowadays is indistinguishable from the village Party committee (referred to as “the Two Committees”). These individuals would be Tibetans. It is unlikely that members or leaders of these committees have any real authority in a village, since the village-resident cadre work team will always have significantly higher status and power.

In terms of physical infrastructure and amenities, as one Chinese academic study put it, commenting on the TAR border village construction project in general, including the CBVs, “the government bears all project construction costs, including housing construction, road construction, and the complete village health stations, cultural activity rooms, telemedicine centres, kindergartens, schools, village public squares, village greening construction, etc.”<sup>52</sup> The cost of the buildings alone (including residential blocks toilets, water supply, drainage, and public buildings) in four of the CBVs was on average 845,000 yuan (c. US\$120,000) per household in early 2023 (see Table 3).



[Fig. 7. Noticeboard showing the “Jieliubu Party Organisational Structure”. On the left are the six members of the “Two Committees” (the “Village Party Branch Committee” and the “Village Committee”); the Party Secretary of the village is Migmar Samdrup, the son of one of the original two herders at Jieliubu. On the right are the four members of the Village-resident Cadre Work Team; the head of the work team also serves as the “First Party Secretary” of the village. Screenshot from “视频·感人故事 | 风雪无阻，这就是杰罗布精神！” (Video: Touching Stories - Undeterred by wind and snow, this is the spirit of Jieliubu), Pt. 3. 西藏卫视+ (Tibet TV), July 5, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vPLpAyoj0A80h6JyrlsUqg>, 5'57"]

**Table 3: Construction costs per household unit in 4 CBVs, 2023** <sup>53</sup>

	Households	Construction site size (sq ms)	Construction costs (yuan)	USD (\$1=7.05yn)	Cost per household (yuan)	USD (\$1=7.05yn)
Demalong [phase 2]	235	25,305	177.76m	\$25.3m	756,426	\$107,271
Qujielong	127	14,858	129.66m	\$18.4m	1,020,945	\$144,783
Semalong	179	19,772	146.50m	\$20.8m	818,436	\$116,065
Jieluobu (expansion)	215	33,171	168.56m	\$23.9m	784,000	\$111,181
Average per household		122.4			844,952	\$119,825

Providing infrastructural and economic support for border villages in Tibet is difficult because all new border villages, whether within China's borders or in disputed territory, are located far from urban centres and were in areas that were not connected to existing road networks. Infrastructure development is especially expensive in the case of CBVs, since they are by definition on the far side of the Himalayas relative to the rest of Tibet and China, are across high mountain passes, and are in areas without any pre-existing roads or other infrastructure. The cost of building the first gravel road into the Beyul in 2015-17 was 98 million yuan (US\$15 million),<sup>54</sup> and construction work in Jieluobu alone in year 2 of the construction programme (2017) cost 45 million yuan (US\$6.9 million).<sup>55</sup> Even transporting furniture for residents' houses is expensive – in 2020, officials spent 30,000 yuan (US\$4,600) on furniture for each new household in Jieluobu.<sup>56</sup> In Demalong in 2023, the cost of just a 1.7km flood defence wall, two small bridges and associated road-hardening around the bridges was 26 million yuan (US\$3.9 million).<sup>57</sup>

In addition, the majority of border villages, and all the CBVs, are at high altitude. Because of the difficulties of long-term adaptation to altitude, the officials therefore have to persuade Tibetans to settle in these high-altitude villages, rather than ethnic Chinese. This is what distinguishes the current Tibet border-relocation policy from traditional Chinese border-relocation security schemes, known as *yimin shibian*, which moved ethnic Chinese farmers or settlers to border regions as security measures (most notably in Mongolia in the 1890s and in Xinjiang since the 1950s).

Since residents of most new border villages are relocatees, the government has to create schemes to generate income for the residents. Income generation is especially important in the case of CBVs, since by definition all the residents of CBVs are relocated from other areas, which is not always the case with the border villages within China's borders.

Many of the new border villages in the TAR are in locations, such as narrow valleys or steep slopes, where normal rural livelihoods – agriculture and animal husbandry – are difficult or impossible. Income generation schemes face particular difficulties in the case of CBVs, where relocatees are often former farmers or herders who will not have access to farming land or pastures in the new location. In Pangda, for example, the authorities have rented 62 greenhouses elsewhere in the county and are training relocatees to work in them,<sup>58</sup> or are teaching the new residents to produce handicrafts in the “Pangda Moderately Well-off Village Handmade Craft Learning Workshop”.<sup>59</sup> As in many of the new border villages throughout the TAR, residents are encouraged to turn their houses into homestays for visiting tourists, a practice known as “making ‘tourist rice’”.<sup>60</sup> This scheme seems ambitious in the case of the CBVs because, at least at Pangda, all visitors – even those from neighbouring villages – have to have a border entry permit to reach the village,<sup>61</sup> and many of the CBVs are in areas where the climate is unsuitable for either tourists or residents.

As a result, tourist traffic is basically limited to domestic Chinese enthusiasts who take part in what is known in China as “red tourism” or “border tourism”. These terms refer to Chinese citizens who demonstrate their support for patriotic, pro-Party or nationalist ideals by visiting sites deemed to be of historical or current significance to the state, including newly acquired border areas. In some cases, these tourists post videos on social media or publish blogposts to celebrate their visits to locations which they describe as China’s recently recovered territory.<sup>62</sup>

In Pangda, a 2m-high noticeboard has been erected with an electronic scoreboard recording the number of border tourists who have hit a button to show that they have visited a border area and, in doing so, defended China’s sovereignty. The notice says “China Tibet Yadong [county], Pangda [village]: Thank you for your patrol for the country and for declaring [our] sovereignty. I am the [number] person who patrolled the border... In my heart I love [my motherland], my pure love is only for China.”<sup>63</sup> By January 2024, the scoreboard showed that 2,353 people had registered as patriotic visitors to Pangda.

However, in the north-eastern sectors, the prospect of “eating tourist rice”, as Chinese refer to profits from the tourist trade, are unlikely. A Chinese tourist who visited Demalong in April 2024 reported that there were very few tourists, no facilities, and non-stop rain.<sup>64</sup> In practice, it seems unlikely that patriotic tourism to CBVs will be sufficient to provide livelihoods for the residents.

A number of official reports about CBVs indicate that residents of some or the new villages are having to migrate temporarily back to inland areas of the TAR to find work. One article about Langmapu, published in May 2023, refers to “migrant workers” in the village, meaning workers who travel outside the village to seek work.<sup>65</sup> Labour migration is a practice that is widely encouraged elsewhere in the TAR, but it would seem to be contradictory to the purpose of the border villages.



[Fig. 8. Patriotic tourist scoreboard at Pangda village in western Bhutan. The notice says “China Tibet Yadong [county], Pangda [village]: Thank you for your patrol for the country and for declaring [our] sovereignty. I am the [number] person who patrolled the border... In my heart I love [my motherland], my pure love is only for China.” Source: “堆纳乡开展走访慰问 问边境村搬迁群众活动”, (Theme Education | Duina Township visits and comforts the relocated people in border villages), 亚东县权威发布 (Yadong County Authoritative Release) Weixin channel, January 3, 2024, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fYpJ2YcF8fKXAsVdC623DA>]

To compensate for the difficulty in finding income sources, the government has to pay each relocatee in a border village a subsidy, as well as additional payments for carrying out regular border patrols and other tasks. The amount of subsidy awarded in each village varies, but some of the factors involved are evident from the recruiting documents distributed by local officials to find volunteers to relocate to new border villages. Table 4 shows three examples of villages listed in a document distributed among Tibetans in an inland area of the TAR in late 2022 (we have anonymised the village names in order to protect the sources who supplied the document). The document invited villagers and herders to apply to relocate to one of eight “new border villages” in the TAR. It lists the altitude of each village, the distance from the county town, the maximum subsidy for each relocatee to that village, and the “area type”. The latter category indicates the suitability of each village for agriculture or herding. In the case of at least two villages on the list, the information about location was misleading: the “area type” of those two villages was said to be “agricultural”, but in fact, those villages are in narrow valleys surrounded by steep mountain slopes with no land nearby which could be used for agriculture.<sup>66</sup>

**Table 4: Extract from document recruiting relocatees for new border villages, TAR, 2022.**

Resettlement sites	Area type	Altitude	Distance to County Town	Average maximum subsidy/person
Village 1	Pastoral/Semi-pastoral	3,300m	220 km	17,600 yuan
Village 2	Agricultural	3,500m	150 km	20,000 yuan
Village 3	Pastoral	4,100m	90 km	16,300 yuan

Note: Names and other details have been removed to protect the source of the document.

The list included three CBVs, including the one which we have called “Village 2” in Table 4. Relocatees to “Village 2” were promised an annual subsidy of 20,000 yuan (c. US\$2,836) per person, close to the highest rate on offer. We know from other sources that relocatees to Demalong, Qujielong and Semalong all received a basic subsidy of 20,000 yuan per year as of 2022. This is equivalent to the average annual per capita income of rural residents of the Tibet Autonomous Region (19,924 yuan) in 2023,<sup>67</sup> and only just below the national average per capita rural income for China that year (21,692 yuan).<sup>68</sup>

In the recruiting document from which these examples were taken, the highest subsidy was not always listed for the most remote village or for the village at the highest altitude, so other factors must be involved in setting the subsidy level. This could be related to the quality of land use in each village, such as those where neither agriculture – in the sense of tilling fields – nor herding are feasible.

Apart from Jiuluobu and Demalong, which have constructed zones that appear to be primarily intended for industrial or, in the case of Demalong, for military use, the villages and smaller settlements appear to be entirely residential. On average there are five to ten non-residential buildings in or close to each village, usually with blue roofs. These are often temporary structures related to the construction process, often providing accommodation for workers, or facilities for storage, production or other purposes. There are otherwise few signs of long-term commercial, industrial or other types of buildings in the villages apart from Jiuluobu and Demalong.



[Fig. 9. Villagers at Langmapu Relocation Site being trained by professional dancers to become performers. The aim of their performances will be “to forge a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, to focus on the development of grassroots cultural relics, and to focus on enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the grassroots masses and on diluting the negative impact of religion.” Source: “主题教育 | 市文化局“优秀人才基层行”——行政村文艺演出队帮扶活动在朗玛普边境小康村开展” (Theme Education: The Municipal Cultural Bureau’s “Excellent Talents Tour at the Grassroots Level” – The Administrative Village Art Performance Team Assistance Activity was launched in the Langmapu Well-off Border Village), 亚东县权威发布 (Yadong County Authoritative Release) Weixin channel, November 22, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7hJf3pGBnnGKofL5R1EGmQ>.]

At least three of the CBVs in the western sector have kindergartens – Pangda 1, Chamapu, and Langmapu.<sup>69</sup> However, despite the publicity within China about the extensive infrastructure and economic support developed to assist the residents of CBVs, until 2024, the CBVs in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan, including the major ones at Jieliobu, Minjiuma, and Demalong, appear to have had no permanent health facilities even after several years after they were opened. As a military news report put it in mid-2024, “since the beginning of the year, the two newly built townships of Demalong and Jieliobu in Lhozha County have welcomed a large number of relocated farmers and herdsman, but the township health centres have not yet been established. Seeking medical treatment has become a problem for everyone.”<sup>70</sup> According to the report, a military medical team visited the main north-eastern CBVs in June 2023 to provide treatment for soldiers, but also treated some local residents. In May 2024, the local government in Lhodrag published calls for bids to construct health clinics at Jieliobu and Demalong.<sup>71</sup>

A number of official media articles have started to describe recreational activities in the CBVs, particularly among those in western sector of Bhutan. These include sports activities and games, the celebration of Chinese festivals, and, in the case of Langmapu, the establishment of a dance performance troupe in the village.<sup>72</sup> The setting up of performance troupes at the level of a natural village is unusual in Tibet, let alone in a CBV. The purpose of forming the Langmapu troupe was explicit: to encourage integration with overall Chinese culture, and to reduce religious activities and belief. The aim was described as being “to forge a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, to focus on the development of grassroots cultural relics, and to focus on enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the grassroots masses and on diluting the negative impact of religion.” Although there is no reference in published texts to a policy discouraging religious practice in the border villages, in the hundreds of Chinese media articles, photographs and videos about life in these villages, there are no indications of or references to any form of religious practice, belief, activities or structures.

## Identifying Village Names

The names of 15 or the 22 villages and settlements which we have identified as constructed in Bhutanese territory have been published in reports by the official Chinese media. The location of seven of these 15 CBVs – Jiuluobu, Minjiama, Demalong, Basanglong, Pangda, Pangda 2 and Langmapu – is already shown on official Chinese maps or is clear from satellite imagery. The locations of the villages of Semalong, Chamapu and Jiwu, which are named in media reports from 2023 onwards, are not marked on official maps but are identifiable from natural features in the landscape visible in official media photographs.<sup>73</sup> The location of Qujielong, named in several media reports, is known by deduction, since no other village has been constructed near the locality of that name.

There are six other CBVs that have not so far been named or referred to in any known Chinese media reports, for which we are using the names Gangbatang, Semalong 3, Lower Minjiama (or Junitang), Demalong 2 (or Demalong West), Qulei, and Qulei South-east. For these CBVs, we have used the name of the nearest locality shown on official Chinese maps. In some cases, we have added a number or other term to distinguish them from nearby villages of the same name.

Four of the CBVs – Jiuluobu, Minjiama, Demalong, and Basanglong – have been officially classified as “administrative villages” (*xingzhengcun*) by the Chinese authorities, even though construction work at Basanglong has seen little progress since 2021.<sup>74</sup> The term indicates that these villages have administrative authority over other local villages (known as “natural villages” or “village groups”). Pangda (sometimes called “Pangda 1”) is described on some Chinese websites as an administrative village, although it is not yet included in the national list of such villages issued by China’s National Bureau of Statistics.<sup>75</sup>

The official media reports referring to these villages were generally published by the county administrations in Yadong or Lhodrag, which administer the western and north-eastern CBVs respectively. In a number of cases, the articles were published by the “Help Tibet” cadre (*yuanzangganbu*) teams from inland areas of China that supervise and fund some of the border relocation projects.

### Chamapu and Jiwu (Gi’u)

The names of two newly-constructed villages in the disputed areas have appeared in recent local-level online articles, using names that have not been seen before: Chamapu and Jiwu. These names are the Chinese terms for two of the Bhutanese valleys that China claims, but are now being used as village names.

Articles about the “Chamapu relocation site” or the “Chamapu well-off border village” first appeared in June 2023. These articles showed that by that time the Chamapu CBV already had a functioning Party and Masses Activity Centre and a kindergarten. The location of this CBV was initially unclear, because the place named Chamapo (Brag dmar po) in Dzongkha, on the south-western flank of the Sinchulungpa plateau, overlooking the Upper Langmarpo river, is not in an area currently occupied by China (though it is claimed by China). However, many Chinese sources use the word “Chamapu” to refer to the Dramana river or valley, the next valley to the north of the Langmarpo. From landscape features visible in media photographs of Chamapu, we can see that the “Chamapu well-off border village” is in fact the official name for the village cluster which in foreign reports has previously been called Sairubu or Lerigang, which is on the Dramana.

The first reference to the “Jiwu relocation site” describes officials visiting the village in May 2024. Although some online, unofficial Chinese commentators equate Jiwu with the Qulei village cluster, and others equate it with the nearby location known as Jiwu Jiadeng, analysis of photographs and videos in official media articles shows that Jiwu (Dzongkha: Gi’u) village is the one previously referred to in foreign reports as Caitangga (Tshethangkha).

References to Semalong, Qujielong, Pangda 2, and Langmapu appeared only recently in Chinese media reports. Pangda 2 (referred to as “Pangda Phase II”) was described in an article about visits there by Shanghai *yuanzangganbu* (“Help Tibet officials”) in August 2021.<sup>76</sup> Qujielong was first referred to only in March 2023, prior to construction, when it was described as “the Qujielong DB relocation and resettlement site” (*DB banqian anzhi dian*).<sup>77</sup> Semalong, which was at that time under construction, first appeared in an official article as a “close-to-the-border resettlement site” (*dibian banqian dian*).<sup>78</sup> A substantive, well-illustrated article about the “Langmapu well-off border village” (*bianjing xiaokang cun*) first appeared in May 2023, when a ceremony was held to show support for workers and job-seekers in the village.<sup>79</sup> It was also described at that time as a “relocation site” (*banqian dian*). Cross-border villages are typically referred to in official articles as “well-off border villages” (*bianjing xiaokang cun*) or “close-to-the-border relocation villages” (*dibian banqian cun*), or more generally (particularly outside Tibet) as *dibian xincun* (close-to-the-border new villages).<sup>80</sup>

## Siting and Altitude

The CBVs and cross-border settlements are located in three types of geophysical location: in shallow valleys between mountain peaks on the high plateau above the tree line; in lower, afforested, narrow valleys or gorges; or, in the cases of Menchuma and Banggala, on a mountain ridge or just below a peak, respectively. All these locations are in areas which were used by Bhutanese, and sometimes Tibetan, herders, during the summers to graze their flocks. None of these locations were considered viable for year-round, let alone permanent, settlement in the past. Most had no built structures apart from occasional shepherds’ huts and outposts for Bhutanese military patrols in the summers, and, in the far southern areas of the Beyul, dwellings for Buddhist meditators and yogis. In the western areas, there were some shelters built by the local Bhutanese administration for visitors to their nature reserves. These areas were thus all uninhabited, if we use that term to refer to permanent settlement.

In terms of altitude, the CBVs in the western sector of Bhutan are on average at 3,658m above sea level; in the north-eastern sector, their average altitude is 3,958m asl. The average altitude for all the CBVs is 3,831m asl. Eleven of the 22 villages and settlements are at sites over 4,000m asl, with the highest being Minjiuma, which is at 4,670m asl. The lowest is Pangda, at 2,139m asl.



[Fig. 10. A typical day in Demalong, the type of image never shown in official Chinese media articles about border villages. Screenshot from a tourist video, filmed in September 2023. See “行摄北北-自驾游 第三季 (16) 拉康镇~拉郊乡~德玛隆村 解锁德玛隆 冷母拉松垭口 填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南” (*Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmula Pass ...*), 行摄北北 (*Travelling to the North*) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hT/>, 15:31".]

In all cases known so far, the permanent residents of CBVs are Tibetans, except for one ethnic Chinese man who married a Tibetan and relocated with her to Jieliubu as a permanent resident. His case has been given some prominence in Chinese media,<sup>81</sup> and it seems likely that the government will encourage other ethnic Chinese to move to border villages in due course. If so, such a policy, already implied by media articles celebrating the distribution of oxygen-generating machines in Tibetan areas,<sup>82</sup> would reflect comments on Chinese social media calling for ethnic Chinese to be moved into the CBVs.<sup>83</sup>

The villages are all located on the south side of the eastern Himalayas and would be generally regarded as unsuitable for year-round residence or farming because of climatic conditions. In the case of the high pasturelands, the winters are too cold and the terrain too exposed. The villages that are in valleys or gorges in most cases are hemmed in by steep mountain slopes and have no space for cultivable land. In addition, the weather in the CBVs is not conducive to year-round habitation. The Beyul in particular is challenging, with Chinese media reporting that the area is liable to closed off by snow for 4-5 months in the winter and has only 70 days of sunshine a year.<sup>84</sup> As noted above, Chinese tourist videos from the Beyul so far circulated on social media have shown incessant rainfall.

These conditions seem likely to cause health problems for relocatees who are not used to extremely damp climates. This already seems to be a problem for the troops stationed there, who face additional problems because of lack of altitude adaptation. In June 2023, when a military medical team visited Jieliubu, Demalong and Minjiama to provide treatment to soldiers and some local residents, it reported a high incidence of coronary problems and kidney stones, as well as “mental health” problems resulting from “psychological pressure on the soldiers” and numerous other ailments.<sup>85</sup>

The residents of CBVs in valleys at lower altitude, such as Pangda, face risks of serious flooding and insect infestation in the summers. The distances from the villages to the nearest county towns are significant – Jieliubu is 156kms by road from Lhodrag, and Demalong is a similar distance. Few of the villages have any form of public transport, and the roads leading to them cross passes at or near to 5,000m asl, making them impassable at times in winter.

The siting of year-round populations in such locations has become feasible only because of major advances in construction technology and, above all, in available funding. The costs for China in providing year-round services and infrastructure for these villages and settlements, let alone the costs of construction, would be unimaginable in most developing countries.

## A Note on Sources

Numerous articles, videos and short television documentaries have been produced by official Chinese media describing life for the residents of the two key or model CBVs, Jieliubu in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan and Pangda in the west. Those articles never suggest that the villages are across an international border. The focus of the articles is on the government's provision of services, infrastructure, and work opportunities for the relocated residents of the CBVs, and on their dedication to carrying out border patrols and defending the nation. Detailed blogposts about the history and politics of China's border villages in or near Bhutan have been published by the anonymous online Chinese commentator Menghuihutu (梦回糊涂), who also publishes and produces maps under the handle @1002Shenme (什么).

The Bhutanese government and media have not published any information about Chinese villages within their territory or made any reference to these villages, apparently because the issue is considered highly sensitive, apart from a brief denial by Bhutan's ambassador in New Delhi concerning Pangda in November 2020,<sup>86</sup> and a general denial by Bhutan's then Prime Minister in March 2023.<sup>87</sup> However, numerous reports of earlier types of cross-border incursions – forceful grazing, tax demands, building of huts and outposts, mule-track construction, and road construction – are outlined in the governmental summaries of the annual sessions of the National Assembly from the early 1990s until the mid-2000s.

Visual information about the villages can be obtained from public images freely available online at World Imagery Wayback (ESRI), RapidEditor (using ESRI, Bing or Mapbox imagery and OpenStreetMap data), and Google Earth. Their images are typically two to three years old but provide important additional information such as historical comparative data and geodata layering. Copernicus (Sentinel Hub) provides free public imagery almost in real time every few days, and allows easy creation of time-lapse videos, but the resolution is low and images are frequently obscured by cloud cover. Detailed data about many of the village sites has been added by online users to the online mapping site OpenStreetMap. Images showing some sites have been published by NDTV, *Foreign Policy*, Reuters, and Chatham House,<sup>88</sup> and on certain social media accounts.<sup>89</sup>

Additional imagery was generously supplied for this project by Planet Lab. Planet Lab also provided analytic data that identified the date and location of each instance of new construction of buildings or roads in the two areas of Bhutan where CBVs have been built. This allowed us to identify a number of border villages, military facilities, roads and settlements within Tibet, and to confirm our identification of the CBVs. In particular, when combined with the time-lapse videos we created from Copernicus, this data enabled us to identify the periods during which construction work took place at each of the CBVs.

As noted above, a number of ordinary Chinese “self-driving tourists” have placed videos online documenting their visits to some of these villages as a part of the “border tourism” trend.<sup>90</sup>

## Part 2. CBVs in North-eastern Bhutan

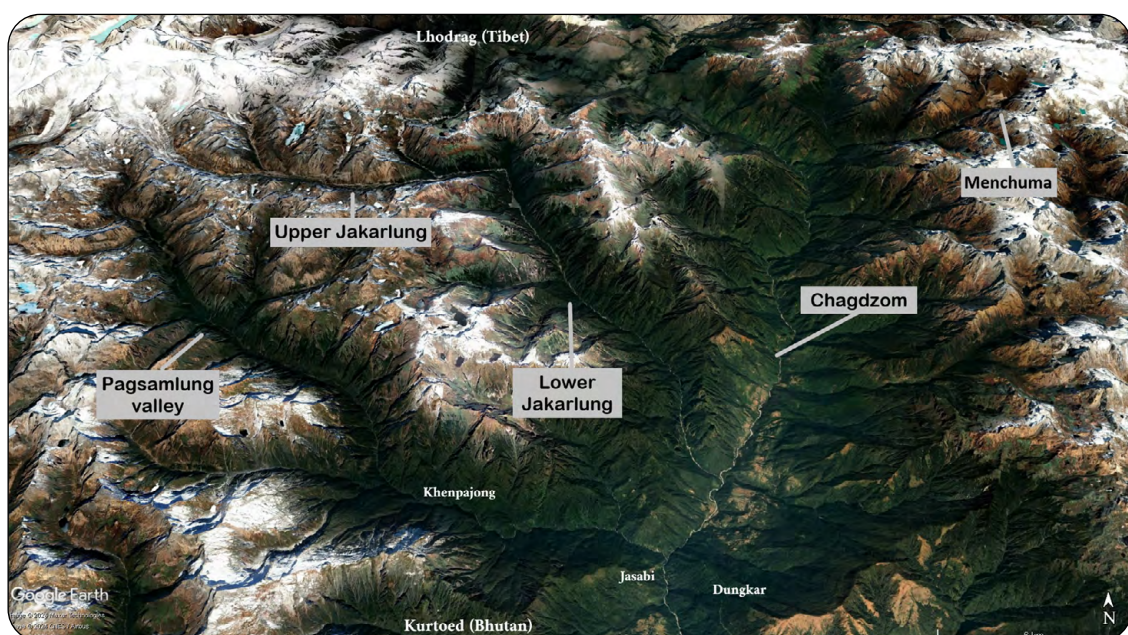
The majority of China's CBVs have been constructed in two parts of what is generally understood to be the north-eastern sector of Bhutan. These two areas are known as the Beyul and Menchuma.

The Beyul (Bas yul), a term meaning "hidden place" in both Dzongkha and Tibetan, is known more fully as the Beyul Khenpajong (Mkhan pa ljongs).<sup>91</sup> It is called "Baiyu" (白玉) by China, which means "white jade". The Beyul extends at its widest point for some 20kms south from the traditional border with Tibet, now China, and approximately 40kms from east to west. Its southern edge is 140kms north-east of the Bhutanese capital, Thimphu.

The Beyul is formed by three valleys divided by high mountain ranges: the Upper Jakarlung (Ch.: Jigenong) valley running west-to-east in its north, the Lower Jakarlung valley running

north-to-south in its east, and the Pagsamlung (Ch.: Basangnong) valley,<sup>92</sup> running from the north-west to the south-east, which forms the western third of the Beyul. Recent research has found that among local residents the term Beyul Khenpajong is used only for the southernmost part of the area loosely termed the Beyul. We have used the term here in its wider sense to include all three of these valleys. The Chinese authorities use the term "Baiyu" variously to refer to two or three of the three valleys.

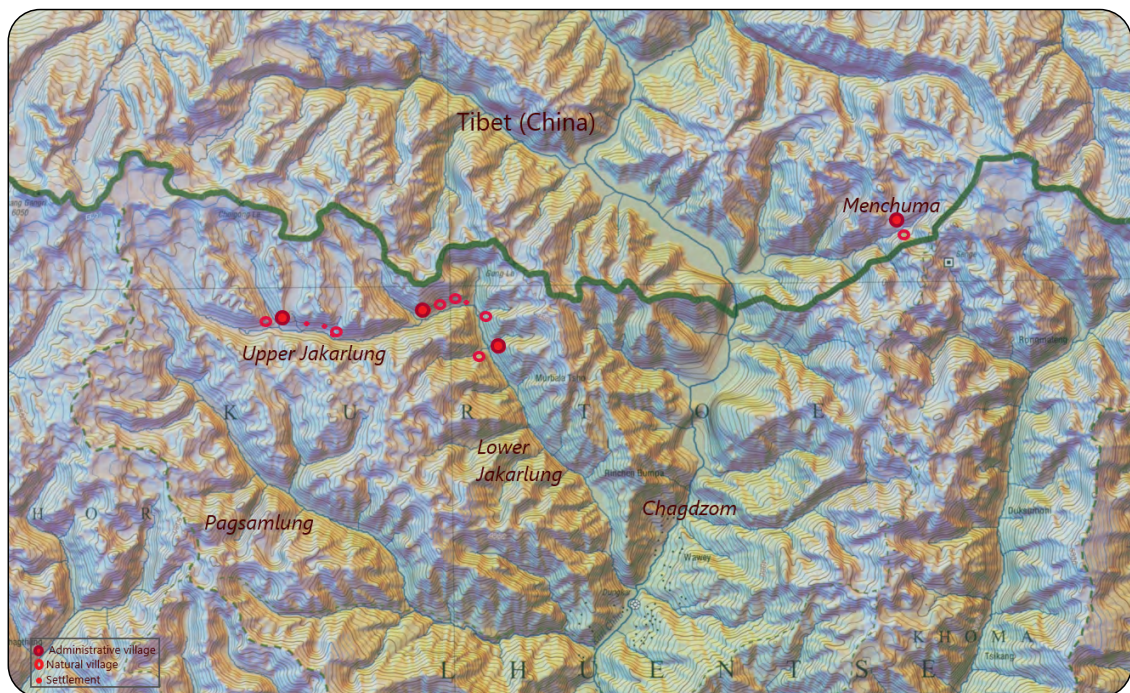
The Upper Jakarlung valley lies directly south of the customary border between Bhutan and Tibet (China), facing the Tibetan county of Lhodrag (Ch.: Luozha), which is part of Lhokha (Ch.: Shannan) municipality in the TAR. The river that runs through the Jakarlung valley is marked on foreign maps (including Chinese ones) as the Jakarlung, although that is in fact the name of the valley, not the river. The river in the Upper Jakarlung is known locally in Dzongkha as the Kur chu, while the river in the Lower Jakarlung is known as the Benzraguru chu or the Yurgang chu. The river that runs through the Pagsamlung valley is known locally as the Yarigang or Yangrilung chu.<sup>93</sup>



[Fig. 11. The three valleys (Pagsamlung, Upper Jakarlung and Lower Jakarlung) that form the area loosely known as the Beyul Khenpajong in north-eastern Bhutan; the Chagdrom area on the west bank of the Kuru chu; and the Menchuma area. Source: Google Earth, image date: December 23, 2023. Names added by the author.]

Bhutan has consistently described its territory as including the entirety of the valleys that form the Beyul, reaching up to the Himalayan ridge that includes the Choekong la (a double pass with the Namgung la) and the Yangjug la pass to the north of the Beyul.<sup>94</sup> Historic maps, including Chinese ones until the 1990s, also show this ridge as the international border.

Official Bhutanese statements often refer to the Beyul as the Pagsamlung, sometimes using the term “Beyul Pasamglum” or “Pasamlum” to refer to the Beyul as a whole.<sup>95</sup> This reflects the fact that the historic and sacred sites in the Beyul are situated in the Pagsamlung valley, rather than in the Jakarlung. Bhutan puts the size of the disputed area in “the Beyul Pasamlun” at 495 sq kms. This must include most of the other two valleys too, since the Pagsamlung valley covers only around 180 sq kms.



[Fig. 12. Bhutan's border with Tibet (China) in Kurtse gewog in the north-eastern sector of the country, as shown on an official map published in 2006. The border runs to the north of the three valleys of the Beyul, but the Menchuma plateau and the north side of the Menchuma gorge are no longer included in Bhutan. Source: 1:250,000 Bhutan Map, Department of Land Survey and Land Records, Thimphu, 2006. Names of valleys and areas in brown and sites of cross-border villages in red have been added by the author.]

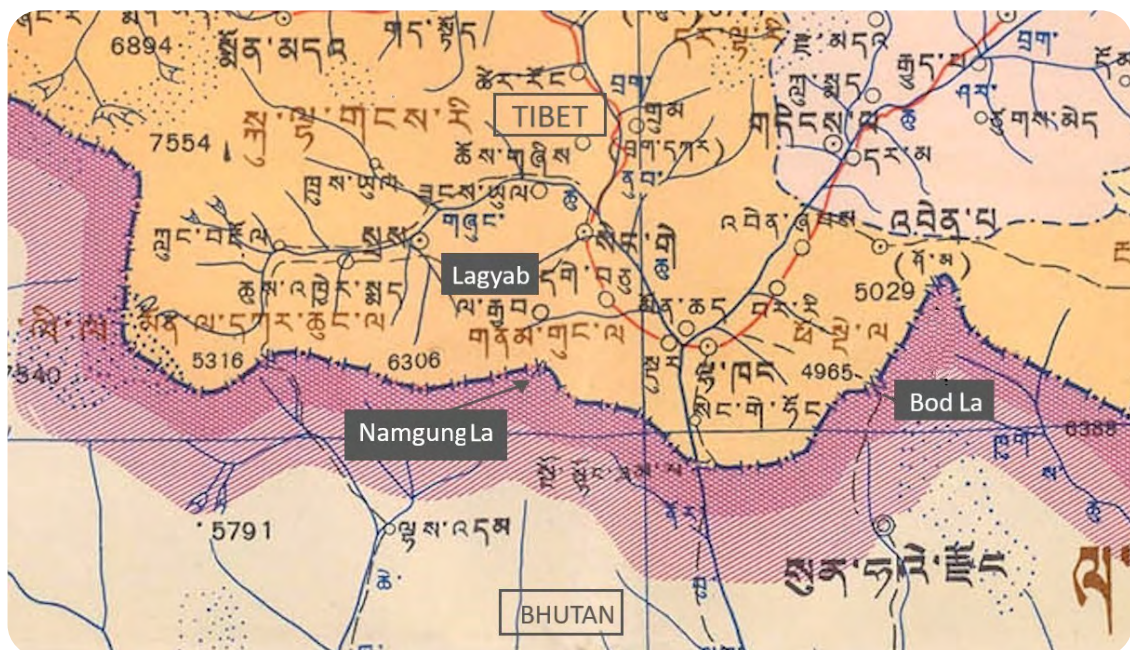
## China's Changing Claims to the Beyul

China has published at least three versions of its claim line to the Beyul, varying in terms of which valleys are included and where the southern and eastern limits of the Beyul are drawn. At least until the late 1980s, as far as we can tell, its maps did not show any part of the Beyul as a part of China.<sup>96</sup> The definitive map produced by the Chinese authorities in Tibetan language showed two of the passes marking the traditional Tibet-Bhutan border – the Namgung la and the Bod la - as the then border between China and Bhutan.

Even in 2020, a map on the wall of the Party office in Lajiao township, which administers the Chinese part of the Beyul, did not show the Beyul as within China's borders.

## Claim 1: All three valleys of the Beyul

From some time in the late 1980s or early 1990s, a number of official Chinese maps started to show the entirety of the Beyul, an area of approximately 600 sq kms, as part of China. This included all three valleys of the Beyul – the Upper Jakarlung, the Lower Jakarlung, and the first 25 kms or so of the Pagsamlung. The southern border on the Pagsamlung was placed by these maps on a roughly west-east line drawn from a pass called the Tshokha la (Ch.: Cuogala 措嘎拉), which overlooks the right (west) bank of a tributary on the west side of the Lower Pagsamlung river. That line was then extended by the Chinese to the Pagsamlung Tsachu or hot springs (Ch.: Basangquzhen 巴桑曲滇), some 25kms downstream from the head of the Pagsamlung valley, where China reportedly has established a “duty point” or temporary outpost.<sup>97</sup> These locations are described as China's border in a number of official Chinese media reports,<sup>98</sup> including one published in 2022 on the website of China's main policy centre on Tibetan affairs in Beijing, which is run by the Party's lead agency on Tibet policy, the United Front Work Department.<sup>99</sup>



[Fig. 13. Detail from the official Tibetan-language map of the TAR, published in 1981. It shows the traditional Tibet-Bhutan border passes, the Namgung la (Gnam gung la) and the Bod la (here written as Pho sde la), as being on the current China-Bhutan border. English names added by the author. Source: Bod rang skyong ljongs srid 'dzin sa khul gyi sa bkra (Tibet Autonomous Region Administrative Area Map), TAR Survey and Mapping Bureau, Lhasa, September 1981.]

This claim line running from Tshokha la to Pagsamlung Tsachu is extended on certain Chinese maps directly to the east, where it places China's southern border on the Lower Jakarlung at the confluence of the Lower Jakarlung and Kuru chu rivers. The confluence is 1km north of the village of Jasabi, and 3kms south the famous mountain-peak monastery of Rinchen Bumpa. This places Rinchen Bumpa within China and puts China's border at this point just 1.8km away from Dungkar, the ancestral home of the Bhutanese royal family.<sup>100</sup>

The area demarcated by the Tshokha la-Pagsamlung Tsachu-Jasabi claim line is referred to in articles published by China's national and local media, which describe the Pagsamlung and the other two valleys of the Beyul as a part of China. Those articles do not mention the Pagsamlung by name, however; instead, they refer to little-known sites within the valley as being within China, such as Cuogala, Lalonglagang (拉龙拉康; Lhalung Lhakhang) and Basangti (巴桑提, Dzongkha name unknown). These reports often attribute these claims to statements by local officials at county or township level in Lhodrag county. As a result, this claim is associated with local-level administrations in Tibet and may have been originally promoted by them.<sup>101</sup>

China's regulations about map publication are strict,<sup>102</sup> and for the claim to the Pagsamlung to have been included in official maps at any level, it must have been approved at central level. Central government endorsement is anyway evident from the fact that the claim to the Pagsamlung was specifically included by China in border negotiations with Bhutan: in 2004, the Bhutanese government confirmed to the National Assembly that the Chinese

government was claiming the entirety of the Beyul down to the Tshokha la-Rinchen Bumpa line, including all three valleys. As Bhutan's then Secretary for International Boundaries put it, referring first to the Dompala, a pass on the ridge to the far northwest of the Beyul, "the Chinese...are claiming that the boundary goes from Dompala to Tshokhala to Rinchen Bumpa."<sup>103</sup>

The claim to the Pagsamlung has not been limited to rhetoric. China has occupied that valley in terms of patrols, outposts and roads. Soon after initial construction work had been completed at Jieliubu, the Chinese authorities started to construct two roads leading from the Upper Jakarlung into side valleys of the Pagsamlung, an aerial distance of around 8kms. The construction work on these roads began in late 2019. In November 2019, a team led by the then Party Secretary of Lhodrag county, Zhao Tianwu, accompanied by "17 local officials, border guards, and joint defence team members", travelled on one of those roads from Jieliubu into the Pagsamlung. The team trekked from the roadhead in the north of the valley down to the far south of the valley, where Zhao called for efforts to "strengthen front-line patrols on the border and to use practical actions to take good care of every inch of the territory of the motherland". The report on Zhao's forward patrol included photographs of him with his team near the ruins of the former temple of Lhalung Lhakhang, close to the locality named in Chinese as Basangti or Basangci. This seems to have been at that time the southernmost patrolling point and the limit of China's actual control in the Pagsamlung, just a short distance upstream from the claimed Tshokha la-Pagsamlung Tsachu-Jasabi border line.<sup>104</sup>



[Fig. 14: Kunsang Tenzin, the Party Secretary of Lagyab (Lajiao) township, in his office. Lajiao is the administrative centre for the Beyul. Behind him are two maps of Lhodrag (Luozha) county. The one on the left shows the Beyul, but only the eastern half, as part of China, while the one on the right does not show the Beyul as part of China. Screenshot from a 2020 video. Credit: Barley Wine Video/Tibet Daily TV channel. URL: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QCnY8za0w7\\_nEJjBAAjDCQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QCnY8za0w7_nEJjBAAjDCQ).]

There have been no further reports in the official Chinese media about officials or patrols travelling to outposts in the Pagsamlung since that November 2019 report, and there have been no visible signs of further work on road construction there since around late 2020. However, patrols and military activities in contested areas are rarely reported in the Chinese media – the November 2019 report of Zhao’s patrol is a historic exception.

Since China included the Pagsamlung claim in its negotiations with Bhutan, China’s mixed signals in public about its claims to the Pagsamlung claim thus cannot represent a split between national and local level officials. Instead, they indicate that local and national officials have been assigned different roles in terms of the stridency and volume of their claims. Indeed, Zhao Tianwu was promoted soon after his trek to the south of the Pagsamlung. Rather, the ambiguity about the Pagsamlung suggests that China has been using it to signal to Bhutan, primarily but not only through sub-national officials, that China will further upgrade its occupation of that valley if Bhutan fails to yield sufficient areas in its west that are claimed by China.



[Fig. 15. The first definitive evidence of Chinese presence in the Pagsamlung valley. This shows the visit by the Lhodrag county Party Secretary, Zhao Tianwu, to the southern part of the valley in November 2019. Here Zhao Tianwu poses with two soldiers from the Border Defense Brigade of the PLA, one police officer and 14 others after placing a Chinese flag on the ruins of what is believed to be Lhalung Lhakhang temple during their three-day stay in the south of the Pagsamlung valley. Found at: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1HBOd7U9\\_l3rmkhgvjXk9Q](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1HBOd7U9_l3rmkhgvjXk9Q). Source: 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha), the Weixin channel of the Lhodrag County Party Committee Office. Image date: November 25, 2019.]

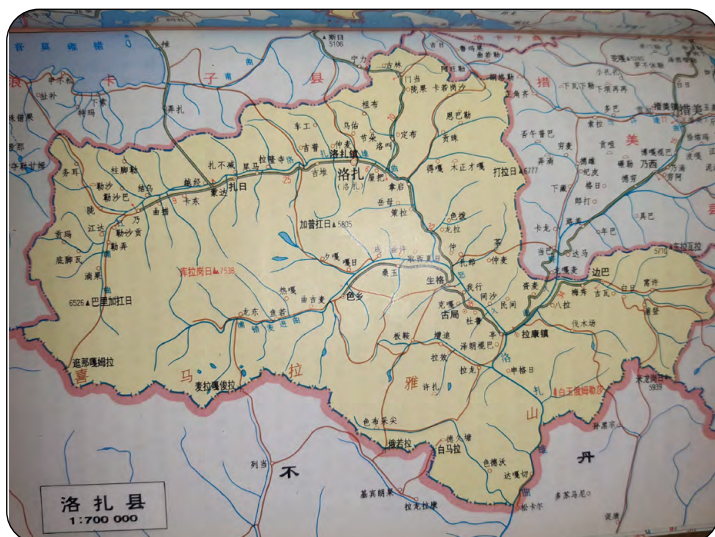
## Claim 2: Two of the three valleys of the Beyul plus Chagdzom

National-level maps in China since at least 2000 show a claim line that includes the Upper Jakarlung and the Lower Jakarlung, but not the Pagsamlung.<sup>105</sup> The claimed area covers roughly 413 sq kms. Like the larger claim area, this claim includes the monastery of Rinchen Bumpa and the entirety of the northern and eastern valleys of the Beyul – the Upper and the Lower Jakarlung – down to the confluence of the Jakarlung with the Kuru chu, close to Dungkar.

Besides these two Jakarlung valleys and the land up to the high ridges on either side of them, this claim includes an additional area which was not part of “Claim 1”, which claimed the entirety of the Beyul but not land beyond it. The additional area claimed by “Claim 2” is outside the Beyul. It consists of the territory lying to the east of the high ridge that forms the eastern flank of the Beyul, down to the west bank of the Kuru chu (known in Chinese as the Luozhaxiongqu or the Lhodrag river). The claim line runs from the Jakarlung-Kuru chu confluence near Jasabi, which is just to the south of the Chagdzom area, and then runs upstream along the Kuru chu to the traditional Bhutanese-Tibetan border at the Kuruchu Tshozam (also known as Ngodong zampa; Ch.: Edongqiao). In this area, therefore, China’s claimed border runs not along a watershed, as is usually the case in the Himalayas, but along a river.

This additional area claimed by China is the western half of Chagdzom\_Chhusa, one of the five *chiwogs* or precincts into which the Bhutanese gewog of Kurtoe in Lhuentse dzongkhag is divided.<sup>106</sup> Unlike the Beyul, the valley floor of the Chagdzom\_Chhusa chiwog is not at high altitude – it rises from 1,570m asl at Jasabi to 2,450ms asl at the traditional border crossing at the Kuruchu Tshozam – and includes permanent settlements. These consist of nine villages and a similar number of smaller settlements with a total adult population of around 280 in 2010,<sup>107</sup> as well as a small military base and a helipad for the Bhutanese army.

The claim to the Chagdzom area has not been publicly referred to by the Chinese government, and there are no reports so far of China operating patrols in that area. However, the Chagdzom area – that is, the west bank of the mid-Kuru chu and the ridge to its west – has been clearly marked as part of China on all official Chinese maps at national level since at least 2001.



[Fig. 16. Road map of Luozha xian (Lhodrag county), 2001. The map shows the Upper Jakarlung and entirety of the Lower Jakarlung down to the confluence near Jasabi as part of China. It does not include the Pagsamlung, but it shows the Chagdzom area (the west bank of the mid-Kuru chu) as within China. It also shows roads or tracks leading from China into the Pagsamlung and shows the Menchuma valley and plateau as within China. Source: Bod ljongs khri'i deb tho (Tibet Region Map Handbook), TAR Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, 2001.]

### **Claim 3: The northern parts of the Beyul and Chagdzom**

A third version of China's borderline shown on some recent Chinese maps includes the Upper Jakarlung and the upper two-thirds of the Lower Jakarlung. This area is around 350 sq kms in size. It does not include the Pagsamlung, the southern 6kms of the Lower Jakarlung, or the southern 6kms of the Chagdzom area. The claimed borderline follows the west-east ridge to the south of the Upper Jakarlung and then drops south to include the northernmost 14kms of the Lower Jakarlung, thus including Demalong and the new road down to Sedewo. It then turns to the east and crosses the ridge on the east flank of the Beyul to the south of the Sergong la pass. It therefore does not include the monastery of Rinchen Bumpa or the southern, inhabited part of Chagdzom. It still includes the northern half of the Chagdzom area.

The area of "Claim 3" thus includes all the CBVs in the Beyul and the valleys in which they are located, plus the Lower Jakarlung down to Sedewo and upper part of the western Chagdzom\_Chhusa chiwog. This claim line is of significance because – apart from the upper Chagdzom area – it matches the area where China has constructed villages and thus the minimum area that China is likely to retain once negotiations with Bhutan are completed.

### **Menchuma**

The second area in Bhutan's north-east that has been claimed by China is the Menchuma area. This area consists of a deep gorge, through which runs the Menchuma river, and a small plateau to the north of this gorge. The western tip of the gorge or valley lies some 15kms to the east of the eastern edge of the Beyul. The plateau and the gorge cover some 55 sq kms. The pass at the northern edge of the Menchuma plateau, which marked the traditional Tibet-Bhutan border, is known as the Bod la (Ch.: Baila 白拉). The pass to the south of the Menchuma gorge is known as the Gang la (Ch.: Gongla 岗拉). Chinese maps since at least 2000 show the Gang la as marking China's border with Bhutan.

Like the Beyul, these areas are or were part of Bhutan's Kurtoe gewog in Lhuentse dzongkhag and were shown on official Chinese maps until the early 1990s as parts of Bhutan.<sup>108</sup> At some point in the mid- or late-1980s, China began to claim the Beyul and Menchuma as parts of its territory. These two areas thus became sites along the Bhutan-China border where China began to apply its sovereignty-assertion strategy. As noted above, at some point in the 2000s, Bhutan stopped including Menchuma in its official maps (see Fig. 12 and "Concessions by Bhutan", below).

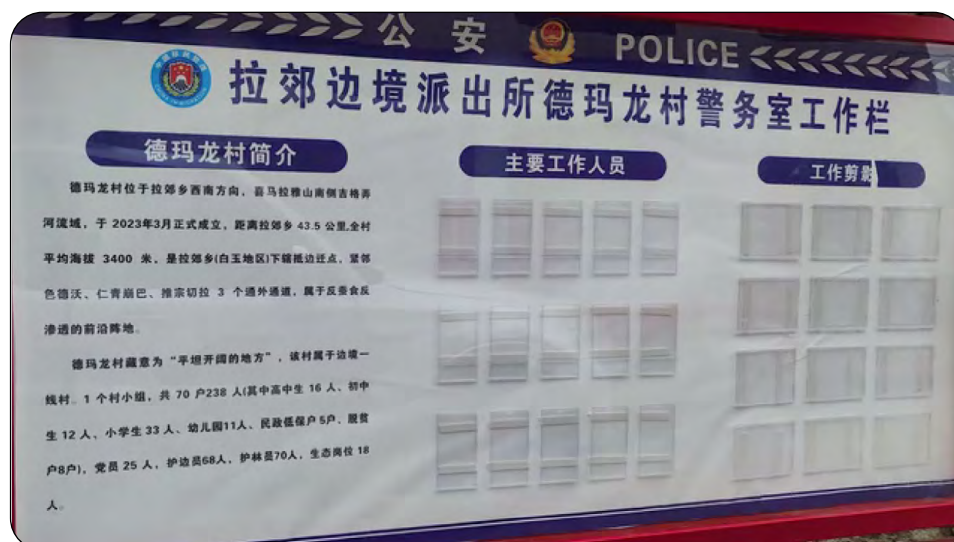
## Strategic Considerations

As we have seen, the CBVs have both a security function and a quasi-legal role in China's efforts to advance a sovereignty claim over a given area or territory. The security role of the CBVs in the north-eastern sector relates to their function in overseeing the routes to or from passes connecting Tibet and Bhutan or along corresponding valleys. These are, in theory, routes which a supposed Tibetan agent or supporter of the exile Dalai Lama and his government might try to use to enter or leave China surreptitiously.

There are two main valley-floor routes and two main passes in the north-eastern sector that a traveller could use to cross from Bhutan to Tibet.<sup>109</sup> The two routes along valley floors follow either the Lower Jakarlung or the Upper Jakarlung. By placing CBVs at Jieliubu and Demalong, China gains control over anyone moving along either of those valleys. The two passes that provide access from Bhutan in that area and lead to the Upper Jakarlung are the Ngarab la (also anglicised as Ngagrab la; Ch.: E'ruola 俄若拉) and Dejuitang (Ch.: 德久塘; the Dzongkha name is not known). These allow a person to cross from the Pagsamlung valley into the Upper Jakarlung valley. It is

through these two passes that China built its two roads into the Pagsamlung in 2019–2020. If Bhutan reaches a settlement with China, these passes are likely to mark the new border and to be important crossing points for trade and travel. Jieliubu is sited at the foot of the new road leading north from the Ngarab la, and Basanglong, the new “administrative village” under construction between Jieliubu and Demalong, is sited at the foot of the route leading north from the Dejuitang pass.

A third pass, the Sergong la (Ch.: Segongla 色公拉), allows travellers to cross the north-south ridge of mountains on the east flank of the Beyul. Just to the north of the monastery of Rinchen Bumpa, the Sergong la was traditionally used by Bhutanese traders travelling from the Chagdzom area of Bhutan into Tibet via the Lower Jakarlung. Demalong is located just upriver from the point where the track from the Sergong la pass reaches the valley floor in the Jakarlung and so allows oversight of anyone travelling upriver after crossing the Sergong la.



[Fig. 17. Noticeboard of the Demalong Village Police Affairs Office (警务室 jingwushi) of the Lajiao Border Sub-Police Station (派出所 paichusuo), September 2023. The text gives details of the population of the village, and explains its strategic purpose as a frontline battle field for anti-nibbling and anti-penetration." Source: "行摄北北-自驾游第三季(16) 拉康镇~拉郊乡~德玛隆村 解锁德玛隆 冷母拉松垭口 填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南" (Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmula Pass ...), 行摄北北 (Travelling to the North) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hT/> at 15'58'.]

A noticeboard outside the police affairs office (a subunit of the area police station) in Demalong explains the basic strategic thinking in this case, at least as understood by local Chinese police in the village. The importance of Demalong, according to the police notice, is because

*“It stands next to three external channels (通外通道) and is [thus] a frontline battle field for anti-encroachment [反蚕食fancanshi, literally “anti-nibbling” or “anti-cannibalization”] and anti-penetration”.*<sup>10</sup>

“Nibbling” is the Chinese term for the gradual acquisition of territory by another state or power, similar to the western concept of salami-slicing. The three “external channels” or passages are named in the notice as Sedewo (色德沃), Renqing Bengba (仁青崩巴), and Tuizongqiela (推宗切拉). Sedewo is the uninhabited locality on the valley floor near the southern tip of the Lower Jakarlung valley, which currently marks the end of the Chinese road leading south from Demalong. Renqing Bengba is the monastery of Rinchen Bumpa situated on the ridge above the southern end of the valley; it is not in fact situated on a pass leading into the valley. The Tuizongqiela must be a pass, but its location or identity are unknown. It seems most likely to be an alternative name for the Sergong la.

Jieluobu, Basanglong and Demalong have another security function: they are at or near the foot of the three passes that lead further north across the Himalayas into Lhodrag and Tibet. From the west, these three crossing points are the pass above Majiatang, known as the Namgung la (Ch.: Lengmugongla 冷母公拉); the pass above Basanglong, known as the Choekong la (Ch.: Qiegongla 切公拉, sometimes written as or Choigongla or Chegongla); and the pass above Qujielong, which is sometimes called the Yanjug la (Ch.: Yanjiula 炎久拉) or Bomba la. A gravel road from Lagyab to Majiatang and Jieluobu over the Namgung la-Choekong la double pass was completed in 2017 (it was upgraded to a hard surface in 2022), and a road from Lagyab over the Choekong la, leading to Basanglong, was completed in late 2020.

Similarly, the two CBVs in Menchuma provide oversight of any movement in that area, either across the Menchuma plateau to or from the Bod la pass on its northern perimeter, or down into the Menchuma gorge from the Gang la pass on its southern edge, which is now defined by China as its border with Bhutan.

**Table 5: Strategic CBVs, North-eastern sector**

Valley	Pass to the south	Pass to the north	CBV	Non-strategic CBVs
Upper Jakarlung	Ngarab la (Eruola)	Namgung la (Lengmugongla), Choekong la (Qiegongla)	Jieluobu	Gangbatang Majiatang
Upper Jakarlung	(Dejiutang)	Choekong la	Basanglong	Semalong Semalong 3
Lower Jakarlung	Sergong la (Segongla)	Yanjug la (Yanjiula), Bomba la <sup>11</sup>	Demalong	Qujielong Demalong 2
Menchuma plateau		Bod la (Baila)	Menchuma	
Menchuma valley	Gang la (Gangla)		Lower Menchuma	

The quasi-legal strategy behind the construction of the CBVs in the north-eastern sector can be understood in terms of what we have called the six-stage approach to sovereignty assertion, discussed above. The Chagdzom area, and other parts in the far south of the Beyul such as Khenpajong, remain at the stage of so-called “no reports”, as Chinese online commentators put it, with no known actions by the Chinese authorities or their agents on the ground. The Pagsamlung valley, with foot patrols, outposts, and roads in two side valleys, is at the fifth stage, that of “outpost and road actual control”. The 6km-stretch of the Lower Jakarlung south from Demalong to Sedewo is also at the fifth stage, since the Chinese authorities have constructed an outpost and a road along that part of the valley, but have not yet constructed villages there. The fact that China has not established villages or settlements in these areas can be understood as a signal to Bhutan that China will return them, or, in the case of the Chagdzom area, will withdraw its claims, if Bhutan accedes to enough of its demands in the western sector.

The Upper Jakarlung, the Menchuma valley, and the northernmost 3kms-long stretch of the Lower Jakarlung are at the sixth stage: from China’s perspective, “administrative actual control” has been achieved in these areas through the construction of villages, by populating them with residents and by establishing the accompanying administrative apparatus of the state in those areas.



[Fig. 18. Map by @1002Shenme (什么) and Menghuihutu showing different stages or types of control in the Beyul and Menchuma in north-eastern Bhutan. Areas in pink marked as (1) are under China’s “actual administrative control” (Upper Jakarlung, northern Lower Jakarlung and Menchuma), meaning that they contain CBVs; those in pink marked as (2) and (3) are under China’s “outpost and road actual control” (Pagsamlung) or China’s “road actual control” (mid-stretch of the Lower Jakarlung, at that time – now it has an outpost). Areas in brown are claimed by China but believed to be patrolled by both sides. Areas in green are “no reports” areas (Khenpajong and Chagdzom), meaning they are claimed by China on some maps but controlled by Bhutan. Areas in yellow are areas with patrolling by both sides which are claimed as parts of China on some official Chinese maps but not on others. Source: Menghuihutu (梦回糊涂), “[中不边界北部(洛扎段)]” ([Northern part of China-Bhutan border (Luozha section)]), April 8, 2023, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/462942822>.]



## Phase 1: Key village construction, 2016-18

### CBV1: Jieliubu

China's assertion of its claim to the Beyul began in the early 1990s with the sending of local Tibetan herders into the Upper Jakarlung valley. Soon after, the herders moved with their herds from the Upper Jakarlung into the Pagsamlung and the south-western part of the Beyul. This action was described by the Chinese side as a response to unacceptable "encroachment" by the Bhutanese side.<sup>112</sup> This led to conflicts with Bhutanese herders,<sup>113</sup> and on one occasion to punitive measures taken by a Bhutanese military patrol.<sup>114</sup> In 1995, China moved to the "hut-building" stage in the Upper Jakarlung: a shepherd's hut or shack was built on an area of grassland in the Upper Jakarlung valley called Majiathang (Dzongkha: Majathang/Mabchathang, literally "Peacock Plain").<sup>115</sup> The shack was constructed in order to enable four Tibetan herders to overwinter in the Beyul.<sup>116</sup> The Beyul, including the Jakarlung, had never had long-term residents or permanent settlements, apart from a very small number of hermits or yogis who at times in the past had practised meditation year-round in caves or bamboo huts (or, in two locations, in a stone building)

in the lower, southern parts of the Beyul, and at one time, a small group of Tibetan refugees escaping from Chinese rule.<sup>117</sup> In the summers, pastoralists stayed in the Beyul with their herds and small Bhutanese military platoons were stationed at one of two checkpoints to provide protection for those pastoralists.<sup>118</sup> No Tibetan or Bhutanese pastoralists would have stayed even in the southern parts of the Beyul over the winter, and to have tried to do so without a permanent shelter in the Jakarlung, which is over 4,000m above sea level, would have probably have been fatal, given that no people or supplies can reach the area for four to five months each winter, when temperatures can drop to minus 20 degrees Celsius.<sup>119</sup>

In 1995, the four herders were persuaded by officials of the Chinese Communist Party in Lhodrag to spend the winter in the hut in the Upper Jakarlung.<sup>120</sup> The four herders became the first permanent residents of the area. They remained there for the following 20 years in order to support China's claim to ownership of the Beyul.



[Fig. 19. The village of Jieliubu after Phase 1 construction was completed in October 2018. Four additional blocks with 20 more homes were added in Phase 2. Screenshot from a video that aired in December 2020. Credit: TAR Internet Information Office. URL: [http://news.xhby.net/tuijian/202101/t20210120\\_6954173.shtml](http://news.xhby.net/tuijian/202101/t20210120_6954173.shtml)]

In 2015, China moved from the “grazing dispute”, “patrol” and “outpost” stages of sovereignty assertion over the Beyul to the road-construction stage, apparently because Bhutan had failed to accede to its demands concerning Doklam and the western border areas. That year, China therefore began work on a road linking the Beyul for the first time to the road network in Tibet (China). The government also announced that year that it would construct a village in the Upper Jakarlung. Neither this announcement nor the resulting village were noticed by outsiders for the next six years.

Work began on the construction of the village in 2016. Though never defined as such by China, this village would become China’s first CBV and the key model for all subsequent CBVs. It was located at a site in the Upper Jakarlung 2kms to the west (upstream) of Majiatang, 4kms south of the Bhutanese border with Tibet, now China. A US map of Bhutan produced in the 1970s showed the name of the site in English as Gelephu. The Chinese authorities rendered this name in Chinese as Jieliobu. Initially, the Chinese authorities wrote the name of the new village on village signboards in Tibetan as Gyalaphug (Rgyal la phug), but later changed the Tibetan spelling to Cheliphug (Bye li phug) or sometimes to Chiliphug (Byi li phug).

The first buildings at Jieliobu were two administrative double-storey blocks and two residential blocks, each of which was subdivided into five family-sized units. In 2017, the four original herders and 12 other residents were moved into the new village. Jieliobu became the flagship project of China’s CBV drive and the base for all its operations in north-eastern Bhutan. About 100 articles appeared in official Chinese media celebrating the construction of the village and describing the contented life of its residents. These articles did not mention or indicate that the village was in disputed territory, let alone that it was in Bhutan. These articles were published in Chinese and Tibetan, but not in any of China’s English-language publications.

Publicity about the Jieliobu model emphasised that a fundamental aspect of CBV-construction was providing a high degree of infrastructural support for the people who were moved into these villages. This meant providing power supplies, connectivity, roads, building materials, food supplies and schemes for income generation, as well as

intensive arrangements for the administration and management of the villages.<sup>121</sup> As noted above, in 2017 alone, the Chinese government spent 45 million yuan (\$6.9 million) on infrastructure construction in the village.<sup>122</sup>

At this stage, however, the population of the village was minimal and the administrative blocks were far larger than the residential ones. In October 2018, when the village of Jieliobu was formally opened, four new residents arrived, bringing the total population of the village to 20, and by 2019, there were still only 23 official residents of the village.<sup>123</sup> The residents, however, may not have been the most important or significant contingent of the village population. Photographs from the village, particularly at important political events and anniversaries, however, show a significant number of additional short-term residents. These included border police units, military units, construction workers and the officials, stationed each for a year or more in the village, who must actually have been running it.<sup>124</sup>

## Phase 2: Constructing Strategic Villages, 2019-20

Once the key village of Jieliobu had been completed, work began on three other villages in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan. Like Jieliobu, these villages had strategic significance in terms of their location and in terms of their role in sustaining China's sovereignty claim: they allowed China to assert administrative control over a particular valley or region, as well as to function as bases for border security and related operations. These villages were Minjiuma on the Menchuma plateau, Demalong in the Lower Jakarlung valley, and Basanglong in the eastern sector of the Upper Jakarlung valley.

### CBV2: Minjiuma

Site clearance for China's second CBV began in late 2018. Known as Minjiuma in Chinese, this village is located on a ridge overlooking a valley known as Menchuma in Dzongkha. The western tip of the Menchuma valley lies some 15kms to the east of the Beyul and extends for 7kms in a northeastern direction upriver to the source of the Menchuma river. A small plateau abuts the Menchuma valley to its north. The north edge of that plateau includes a famous pass, the Bod la (sometimes called the Pho sde la, Poda la, Boto la or Bodo la in Dzongkha or Tibetan; Ch.: Baila), which marked the traditional border between Bhutan and Tibet.<sup>125</sup> The Tibetan government had a border post on the north side of the Bod la, at least in the early twentieth century, and regarded Menchuma as part of Bhutan.<sup>126</sup> Chinese maps in the 1980s clearly showed the Bod la pass as the border with Bhutan, and official Bhutanese maps in the 1990s,

such as the Ministry of Agriculture's Land Cover map of November 1994, showed the Menchuma valley and the adjoining plateau as part of Kurtoe gewog, in Bhutan's Lhuentse dzongkhag.

As with the northern areas of the Beyul, the Menchuma valley and plateau were uninhabited except for occasional herders in the summer.

At some point in or prior to 2014, China advanced to the second stage in sovereignty-assertion on the Menchuma plateau by erecting three huts or shelters on the plateau. Each had the distinctive blue or red roofs used by Chinese constructors, suggesting that they were temporary structures. By October 2017, Chinese officials had moved to the third stage: the construction of a road across the plateau. By September 2018 work had begun on clearing a site for the construction of the Minjiuma CBV at the southernmost edge of that plateau, some 3.5kms south of the Bod la and the traditional border with Bhutan. By August 2019, work had begun on five residential blocks in four rows, comprising an estimated 30 housing units.

The CBV constructed by China at Minjiuma differs strikingly from the CBV at Jieliobu, and most subsequent CBVs, in that it is not in a valley. It is sited on an exposed, south-facing ridge at just under 4,700m asl, and would normally be considered uninhabitable. It ranks among the ten highest sites of human settlement in the world, let alone on the south face of the eastern Himalayas. So far, most of the Minjiuma residents are moved out of the village to a nearby town at a lower altitude each winter.



[Fig. 20. The new border village (technically classified as a "community" or shequ) at Minjiuma, situated on a ridge overlooking the Menchuma gorge, as shown in an image captured on November 11, 2020. Source: Google Earth.]

In the case of Minjuma, China's sovereignty-assertion strategy seems to have been unusually effective: by 2006, even before the first huts or roads were constructed on the plateau, Bhutan had stopped showing either Menchuma or the Bod la as within Bhutan on its official maps.<sup>127</sup> Bhutan therefore appears to have ceded the Menchuma region to China at some point in the early 2000s. This has never been reported or made public.

### CBV3: Demalong

China's third CBV in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan was constructed at a site called Dermalung in Dzongkha, situated in the northern stretch of the Lower Jakarlung valley. Bhutanese troops had used a small hut or lean-to at Dermalung in the summers for some decades as an outpost to provide protection for seasonal Bhutanese herders, but by 2005 had moved south when conflicts with Tibetan herders led the Bhutanese herders to give up grazing in the northern parts of the Beyul.<sup>128</sup> At some point in the later 2010s the Chinese, who refer to the site as Demalong, erected a crude lean-to or shed 5.2kms south of the start of the Lower Jakarlung; this became the Demalong outpost. It would become one of seven outposts or "duty points" at Demalong, spread along the valley floor or on the mountain slopes.<sup>129</sup> Construction of a road to the area began in the summer of 2019. By November 2020, the first phase of construction

at Demalong had been completed. It then consisted of three blocks on the east side of the Lower Jakarlung, containing approximately 16 housing units. Demalong at this stage appears to have been used primarily as a site for training or stationing troops. One official Chinese media report refers to a "Garrison Training Point" (zhudi budui zhuxundian 驻地部队驻训点) at Demalong.<sup>130</sup> Media reports of this kind rarely mention troops or show photographs of them, but each New Year, a report appears showing officials thanking soldiers for their work, and the report on the officials' New Year visit to Demalong in February 2021 shows a PLA captain receiving the officials, and a video of the officials' visit in February 2023 shows 20 soldiers receiving the delegates.<sup>131</sup> As of late 2023, the southern part of the village, and the road to Sedewo in the south of the valley, was off-limits to the public and was marked by a sign saying "Military Management Zone" (junshi guanliqu).<sup>132</sup> In June 2024 a media report identified the military unit at Demalong as the "Demalong Border Defence Company".<sup>133</sup> In the Chinese military system, a company (lian) typically consists of 100 troops.



[Fig. 21. Sign announcing the start of the "military management zone" at Demalong. Screengrab from tourist video. Source: "行摄北北-自驾游 第三季 (16) 拉康镇-拉郊乡-德玛隆村 解锁德玛隆 冷母拉松垭口 填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南" (Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmula Pass ...), 行摄北北 (Travelling to North) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hT/>.]

#### CBV4: Basanglong

The fourth CBV established by China in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan (and the fifth CBV it had built in territory disputed with Bhutan) is at a location known in Chinese as Basanglong. The Dzongkha or Tibetan names are not known.<sup>134</sup> It is situated on the north bank of the Upper Jakarlung, 7kms east of Jiuluobu, at the point where a second (eastern) road crosses the Choekong la pass and connects Lhodrag county in Tibet with the Upper Jakarlung valley and the Beyul. That road was completed by September 2020. The construction of the village began some three months later.

The name of the village did not emerge until 2021, when Basanglong appeared in the annual list of villages published by China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and was added to official Chinese maps.<sup>135</sup> The inclusion of Basanglong in the official NBS list means that it is classified as one of the four "administrative villages" among the CBVs in the north-eastern sector, so it would usually be larger and have more facilities and more resident officials than a "natural village". However, building work at Basanglong had hardly started even four years after the site was cleared for construction in April 2020. By mid-2024, only six buildings were visible at the site.

By the time Phase 2 finished in late 2020, the Chinese authorities had established three CBVs in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan – Jiuluobu, Minjiuma, and Demalong – and had started work on Basanglong. The populations of these four villages were, however, minimal: the four villages consisted of 16 residential buildings or blocks in total, offering approximately 80 housing units. If China had decided at this stage to renounce its claim to the entirety of the Beyul in return for the concessions it sought from Bhutan, it could still have done so without facing major difficulties.



[Fig. 22. Basanglong new village in the Upper Jakarlung valley, photographed on December 21 2023, showing the cleared construction site, but still few buildings. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback,

<https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=90.98134%2C27.98514%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]

### Phase 3: CBV Expansion, 2020-23

Over the following three years, the authorities focused on expanding the size and population of the first three of the four new villages.

Expanding CBV1: In Jieliobu, two new residential blocks with a total of 10 units were added on the eastern side of the village in October 2020 (Jieliobu Phase 2), and an additional 24 households were said to have moved into the village during that year. A further two blocks, plus two smaller buildings, were added in October 2021 (phase 3), adding another 14 housing units, making a total of 34 units. By November 2021, there were officially 27 households in the village, comprising 88 residents.<sup>136</sup> By the end of 2022, the population of the village was closer to 200, according to one report.<sup>137</sup> By October 2023 a new residential site had been constructed to the north-west of the main village. It added 12 buildings containing 23 new housing units to the Jieliobu complex, bringing the total number of residential buildings to 20, and the units to around 57.<sup>138</sup>

The village also began to develop industrial or work facilities. These facilities, consisting of some 30 buildings or warehouses, were mainly concentrated in an industrial compound on the south-west side of the village. Construction of the compound started

in November 2021, including industrial buildings, storage tanks, and other facilities. Construction of a second industrial compound or work-space to the south of the village began in August 2023.

Expanding CBV2: At Minjiuma, three new rows had been added to the south-west of the village by November 2020, together with two more rows in the centre of the main village, adding 34 housing units in all. By the end of that year, 20 new households had already been moved into the new village. In January 2021 work began on Minjiuma Phase 3, comprising 3,000 sq ms of development, which was completed by June 2021.<sup>139</sup> Three more rows of houses were added to the south-west of the main village from October 2022. These were completed by May 2023, bringing the total of buildings to 20 and the estimated number of housing units to 85.

Adding CBV5: Lower Minjiuma. In the case of Minjiuma, the expansion project took the form of building an additional nearby village. At the same time as the main site at Minjiuma was being expanded in the autumn of 2020, the site for the new village was being developed in the gorge 800 metres below the main village. We are calling the new village Lower Minjiuma, although other possible names are Minjiuma 2 or Junitang (the name shown on Chinese maps for a locality nearby in the Menchuma gorge).



[Fig. 23. Jieliobu during the expansion process, autumn 2023. The administrative buildings from Phase 1 are in the background, centre; in the foreground are the residential buildings from Phase 2, and on the left are areas that are being developed as industrial or commercial compounds. Date and photographer not known. Source: @Peter168, October 25, 2023, <https://x.com/peter16813/status/17171166202729608/photo/2>.]

The first buildings at Lower Minjiuma were three temporary structures with a blue roof, forming a 3-sided compound on the valley floor. By May 2021, the authorities had begun building permanent structures at the village. The three temporary structures were demolished. By late 2021, this second village at Minjiuma included some 16 buildings, providing an estimated 28 housing units.

Because of its location in the gorge, Lower Minjiuma has strategic significance for China. Firstly, it is situated immediately below the pass known as the Gang la, which marks what China now considers to be its border with the far north-eastern area of Bhutan (Senge dzong in Khoma gewog, part of Lhuentse dzongkhag).<sup>140</sup> Secondly, it allows China to extend the road that has been built from Lakang xiang (township) in the north across the Bod la and the Menchuma plateau. That

road is now being extended from Lower Menchuma along the Menchuma valley, so that it will be able to link to the road network in the next valley to the west, the Kuru chu, where China is building two hydropower stations, Songbuqu and Edongqiao,<sup>141</sup> and another border village.<sup>142</sup> The construction of Lower Minjiuma thus brings the number of strategically-placed CBVs in Bhutan's north-east to five.

Expanding CBV3: The expansion of Demalong was more dramatic. The expansion initially involved an area of 5,000 sq ms (0.005 sq kms).<sup>143</sup> Pre-construction or site clearance started in September 2020, and in January 2021 construction work began. The initial three blocks from Phase 1 were demolished and were replaced by nine residential blocks by November 2021, with some 39 housing units (Demalong Phase 2).<sup>144</sup> By July 2022,



[Fig. 24. Lower Minjiuma (Junitang) as shown in an image captured on December 21, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=91.26683%2C28.03079%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]

a further seven blocks had been added to the north of the initial site, adding 27 housing units to the stock (Phase 3). By the end of 2022, there were 70 households with 238 residents. The police noticeboard in the village said that the residents included 72 children or teenagers, including 16 senior middle school students, 12 junior middle school students, 33 primary school students, and 11 children of preschool age. It also noted that five of the households were receiving poverty (低保 dibao) supplements, with another eight households classified as having recently been lifted “out of poverty”. According to the notice, 25 of the 238 residents were Party members. It added that 68 residents were “border guards” and 70 were “forest guards”, indicating that they received additional payments for carrying out those tasks.<sup>145</sup>

In winter 2022, a large tract of forest was cleared to the north of the site. By November 2023, a further 28 buildings had been constructed in five rows, providing 71 more housing units (Phase 4). 38 more families moved into the village the following month.<sup>146</sup> By early 2024, this brought the total number of residential buildings at Demalong to 44. About 137 family-sized units were visible by that time on satellite images.<sup>147</sup>

Overall, Phase 3 of the CBV construction program in the north-east involved significant expansion of the three main villages built in Phases 1 and 2. In the three years from 2020, the number of buildings in these villages increased sixfold, from 16 to around 115, while their residential capacity went from approximately 80 family-sized units to an estimated 344 units, suggesting a possible population of around 1,200 residents.

## Phase 4: Non-strategic CBVs, 2023-24

In 2023, the authorities began a new approach to CBV construction. As well as expanding and adding to the existing strategic villages, they began building additional, non-strategic CBVs – that is, CBVs which had no apparent security or “lawfare” function. From early 2023 to mid-2024, the Chinese authorities constructed six additional villages of this kind and a settlement in the Upper and Lower Jakarlung valleys: Majiatang new village, Gangbatang, an unnamed settlement, Semalong, Qujielong, Semalong 3, and Demalong 2. None of these villages are publicly listed by the Chinese authorities as administrative villages, so their status is lower than the four larger strategic villages and their official names are not known. They have no evident strategic purpose in terms of their location or other features, and seemingly have little purpose in a sovereignty-assertion strategy apart from adding to population density in the area. Three of these villages – Demalong 2, Gangbatang and Semalong 3 – are sited next to existing villages (Demalong, Jieluobu and Semalong respectively), but appear to be distinct in their lay-out and were constructed at a later time than the neighbouring village, making it likely that the authorities will treat them as separate villages.

The six villages built in this phase are noticeably larger than the first four strategic villages were when initially constructed in 2016-2020, prior to their expansion. Five of the six new villages were built in 2023, and the sixth in 2024. If listed from west to east, the first of the six additional villages is Gangbatang (CBV7 in the north-east, if listed chronologically), which is immediately to the south-west of Jieluobu, with 62 residential buildings divided into an estimated 128 housing units.

2kms to the east along the Upper Jakarlung is Majiatang new village, with 30 buildings containing 64 units (CBV6). 6kms further east along the valley.



[Fig. 25. Gangbatang, the new village on the western edge of Jieliubu. The blue-roofed buildings appear to be industrial or commercial compounds attached to Jieliubu. Source: @John\_Pollock22 (Chatham House/The World Today), [https://x.com/John\\_Pollock22/status/1733899061395116483](https://x.com/John_Pollock22/status/1733899061395116483). Credit: Maxar.]



[Fig. 26. Demalong 2 (lower left), on the west bank of the Lower Jakarlung, facing Demalong on the east bank. Image date: December 21, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=91.01654%2C27.97108%2C16&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]

1km east of Basanglong, is Semalong 3, with 15 buildings comprising an estimated 44 units (CBV11). It abuts the village of Semalong, which has 54 buildings containing some 174 units (CBV8). 1km to the east, at the start of the Lower Jakarlung, is Qujielong, with 33 buildings that include 115 units (CBV10). 1 km further to the south is Demalong 2, separated from Demalong by the Jakarlung river, with 52 buildings and 145 units (CBV9).

The location of these new villages results in an extraordinary concentration of built settlements. Going from west to east, three of the villages – Semalong 3, Semalong, and Qujielong – are positioned almost side by side along a single 5km-stretch of road. Gangbatang, Semalong 3 and Demalong 2 are each less than 100m from the next closest village. In the 6kms stretch of road that runs along the Jakarlung from Basanglong to Demalong, there are now six villages as well as at least one small settlement.

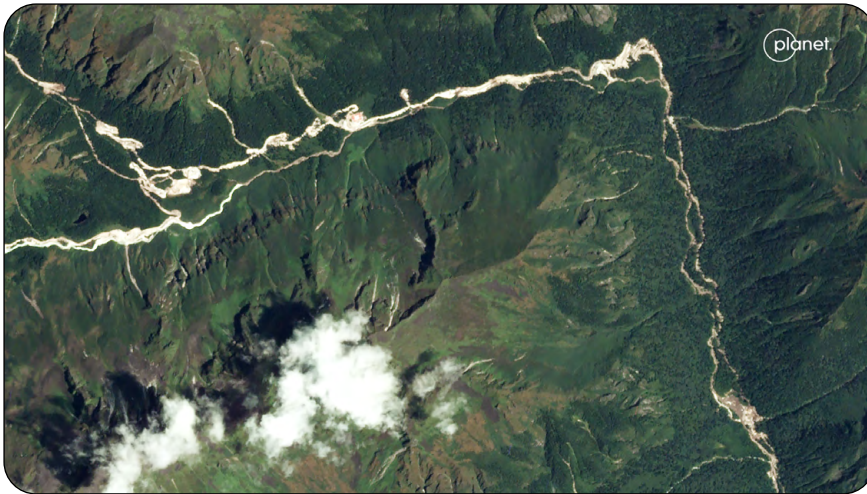
In all, the seven non-strategic villages and the settlement constructed in 2023-24 have added 246 residential buildings containing 672 family-sized units to the housing stock of the CBVs in the Beyul.



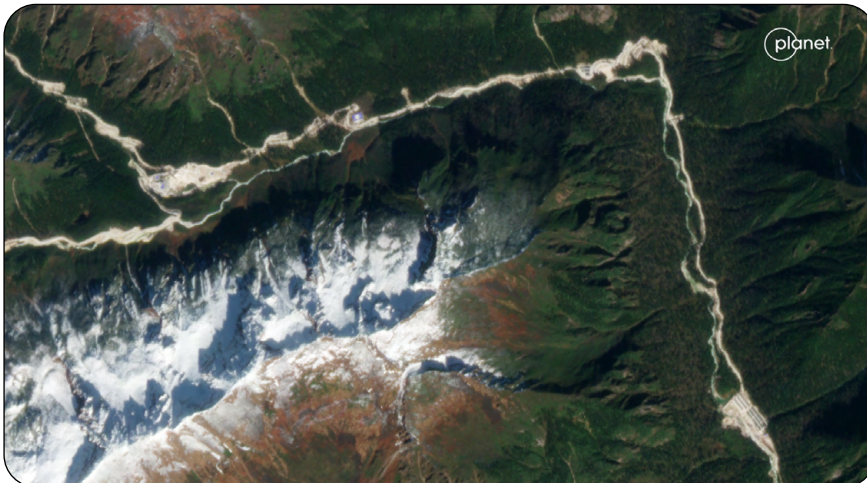
[Fig. 27. Majiatang new village in the Upper Jakarlung valley, photographed December 2023. Source: @John\_Pollock22 (Chatham House/The World Today), [https://x.com/John\\_Pollock22/status/1733899061395116483](https://x.com/John_Pollock22/status/1733899061395116483). Credit: Maxar.]



[Fig. 28. Dancers at a ceremony to welcome relocatees arriving at Semalong new village. “This art performance conveyed the voice of the Party to the relocated people in a popular form and promoted the country’s people-friendly policies to the people.” [奋进新征程 建功新时代]·速览洛扎” ([Strive for a new journey and make contributions to the new era] A quick look at Luozha), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, September 26, 2024, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/VlpSzPkjxNLjZyFYHlrMQ>.]



[Fig. 29. Road construction in the Upper Jakarlung and Lower Jakarlung valleys as far as Demalong, where a site has been cleared for construction. At top centre is a red-roofed compound that is presumed to be a military base. Image date: August 19, 2020. . Source: Planet Lab.]



[Fig. 30. The site at Basanglong has been cleared for construction, the military base has a blue road, and Phase 3 of construction at Demalong is near completion. Image date: November 3, 2022. Source: Planet Lab.]



[Fig. 31. Basanglong, Semalong 3, and Semalong in the Upper Jakarlung valley, and Qujielong, Demalong and Demalong 2 in the Lower Jakarlung valley. Image date: August 1, 2024. Source: Planet Lab.]

## Small Settlements and Incomplete Construction

Besides the 11 villages or village clusters in the north-eastern sector, three smaller villages or settlements are now visible in satellite imagery, each with nine or less residential blocks. All three are situated in the Upper Jakarlung valley. One, constructed in 2021-22, is just under 1km east of the new village cluster of Semalong, immediately before the Jakarlung takes a 90-degree turn to the south. We have called this settlement Semalong 2. A second settlement, just 800m further east along the Upper Jakarlung, dating probably from the 2010s or earlier, is Majiatang, the original group of eight scattered buildings where the herders were first sent to construct a shelter in order to make the claim to the Beyul. The third settlement, with 4 buildings, is 1km east of Jienuobu, and was constructed in 2023. We have not been able to guess the name of this settlement, since the names of places near it are not known.

None of these settlements has a public building or a central square. They are therefore unlikely to be listed by the Chinese government as villages.

In addition, in around October 2023, clearance work began on a new site just south of Demalong, in the lower Jakarlung valley.

About 200ms from north to south, the site will be large enough for about 15 buildings. As noted above, a large site has been cleared at Basanglong, but no new building work has been observed there since September 2021.

In late 2019, the local authorities in Lhodrag put out a call for construction companies to bid for a housing project at Sedewo, the southernmost location within China's claimed area on the Lower Jakarlung, 8kms to the south of Demalong.<sup>148</sup> However, Sedewo is in a steep gully, where the valley floor is only some 60m across at its widest, so village construction would be extremely difficult. China succeeded in building a road to within 1km of Sedewo in January 2021 and constructed a small hut or outpost there in 2023, but there is no sign so far that any other construction has taken place at this location. A village at Sedewo would be by far the closest any CBV has come to established Bhutanese settlements and villages, as Sedewo is only 5 kms from the monastery of Rinchen Bumpa, and only 10km from the village of Dungkar, the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. Although online one can read comments from online Chinese social media users calling for more CBVs to be constructed in the Beyul, including specifically at Sedewo,<sup>149</sup> it seems likely that the government's plan to build a housing project there changed at some point after 2019.



[Fig. 32. A small settlement in the Upper Jakarlung valley which we are calling Semalong 2. Image date: December 21, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=91.00648%2C27.99052%2C18&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]

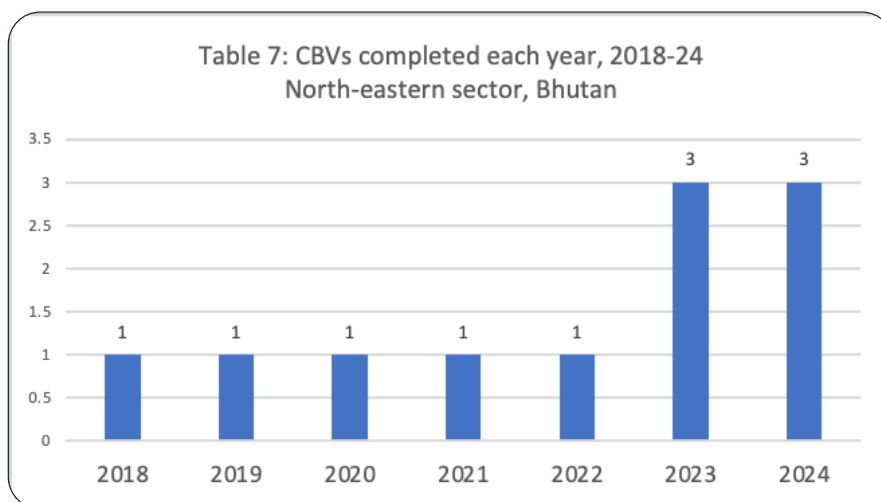
### Phases and Their Implications

The four phases of the CBV project in the north-eastern sector clearly show a surge in the intensity and scale of construction after 2020 and a larger surge after 2022. In the first eight years after the CBV program began in 2016, China constructed five CBVs in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan. In the following 18 months - from early 2023 to mid-2024 - it completed six more CBVs and a settlement.

The time required to complete the construction of a CBV also changed. The first one, Jieliobu, took two years for its first phase to be completed, and that phase consisted of just 10 residential units and an administrative block. The most recent CBV, Semalong 3, took a little over four months to build, and appears so far to have at least 40 housing units. Over time, the size of each village and its population has increased dramatically: CBV1, Jieliobu, had 20 residents at the completion of Phase 1 in 2018 after 2 years work, whereas Semalong, completed within some three months by December 2023, has 174 housing units. In addition, larger villages began to include industrial sections, and two settlements were built in between villages.

More significantly, the apparent purpose of the CBVs changed over time. The construction of the first five CBVs in the north-eastern sector was relatively easy to explain: besides their security roles, they represented the assertion of “administrative actual control”, and therefore of sovereignty, in a particular valley or area. They thus sent a message to Bhutan that it would lose these territories unless it agreed to China’s so-called package deal. By 2020, however, China had already achieved the sixth stage of sovereignty-assertion in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan – it had established an undeniable administrative presence in Menchuma and in the Upper and Lower Jakarlung valleys. This left Bhutan by that time with very few options, if any, other than to accept China’s demand that it relinquish territory in western Bhutan if it wanted to regain its ownership of the Beyul or Menchuma.

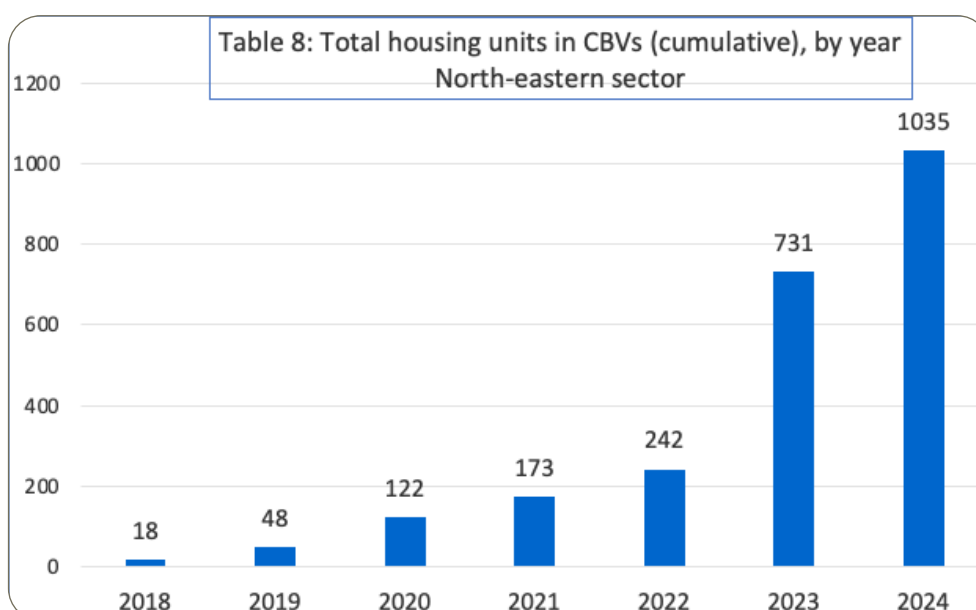
Yet China still initiated the surges in CBV-construction in 2020-2022 and in 2023-24. This can be seen by looking at the number of housing units completed each year. Between 2016 and 2020 a total of 16 residential buildings were built in the Beyul and Menchuma, which included approximately 80 household-sized units. By mid-2024, there were 369 residential buildings in the north-eastern CBVs, with an estimated 1,035 family-sized, a 1,200% increase over 2020.



					Majiatang	Demalong 2
					Gangbatang	Qujielong
Jieliobu	Minjiuma	Demalong	Basanglong	Lower Minjiuma	Semalong	Semalong 3

Why then did China continue to expand and build CBVs in the Beyul and Menchuma after 2020, first by expanding existing villages and then by adding new ones? Unlike the first five CBVs, the expansion drive does not appear to be addressing any obvious strategic or security needs. China had already achieved full administrative control of the relevant valleys and plateau, and had locked Bhutan into a diplomatic position from which it had few if any options other than to concede to the extent possible. Nor has the expansion and intensification of China's presence in these areas come to an end. As we have seen, two large sites have been cleared for construction at Basanglong and just south of Demalong, and the Lhodrag county government, which oversees the CBVs in the Beyul and Menchuma, announced in its annual work report for 2023 that in the coming year three of the CBVs in the north-eastern sector that are currently classed as administrative villages—Jieluobu, Minjuma and Demalong – are to be upgraded to the level of townships (xiang) or towns (zhen).<sup>150</sup> This implies that they will be further enlarged, and that they may have additional subsidiary villages beneath them, some of which may in turn be upgraded to administrative villages. This suggests an exceptional concentration of administrative resources and population within a small area.

There are four factors or hypotheses that could explain the shift in China's CBV strategy in north-eastern Bhutan from limited strategic village-construction to multiple village-expansion schemes and intensive urbanisation. The first of these suggests a major shift in the negotiating climate between China and Bhutan. If we assume, as seems likely, that Beijing still thought up to 2020 or so that Bhutan could be persuaded to cede Doklam to China, it would explain why construction and settlement were relatively small in scale at that time – if Bhutan accepted the package deal in full, in theory China would have to renounce the territories it has claimed and return those that it has settled in the north-eastern sector. But, after 20 years of unsuccessful negotiations with Thimphu, Beijing may have concluded – or may have been informed by Bhutan – that, because of its obligations to India, Bhutan will not be able to give up Doklam. Indeed, Bhutan's previous prime minister made it clear in 2023 that his government was willing to give up the western areas demanded by China, but noted that the Doklam issue could not be decided without Indian involvement.<sup>151</sup> If that means, as seems likely, that Bhutan does not expect India to give consent for Bhutan to cede Doklam to China, then Beijing will then not consider itself obliged to return all the areas it has settled in the Beyul and Menchuma.



China's package deal, according to the Chinese side, is pro-rated. China undertook to give up areas it claims in a roughly 2:1 proportion to the amount of land given to it by Bhutan. Thus, if Bhutan were to give up, say, 100 sq kms of territory in the west, but not Doklam, it would get back from China 200 sq kms of China's claims in the north-eastern sector. Since China's claims there are close to 500 sq kms, depending on which claim line it invokes, China could return some unsettled areas and retain the Jakarlung and Menchuma areas. This would explain why China has occupied but not settled the Pagsamlung valley and why that valley has been kept at the "outposts and roads" stage. It also would explain why China has claimed but not occupied or perhaps even patrolled the Chagdzom area to the east of the Beyul. These "trading spaces" allow China to renounce these areas as part of an exchange with Bhutan without having to give up the settled areas in the Jakarlung and Menchuma.

This suggests that sometime after 2020, the sovereignty-assertion project, of which the CBVs were the crowning element, was no longer treated as a short-term device for placing negotiating pressure on Bhutan. It became instead a method for permanent territorial acquisition.

A second possible factor behind the post-2020 and post-2022 surges in construction and settlement in the Beyul and Menchuma concerns economic calculations. As we have seen, since 2017 China has required local governments in the TAR to designate 240,000 villagers as "guardians of the sacred land" as a form of enhanced border security, including by relocating them to remote border villages if they are not already living in one.<sup>152</sup> The argument that China faces a security threat because of low population density near the high Himalayan passes in such places as the Beyul or elsewhere on the Bhutan border is not compelling, as noted above, but border village construction has anyway been made a major priority for local governments in all areas along the borders of the TAR and other areas of China. As a corollary to this border-strengthening policy, local administrations are also required by Beijing to boost income generation in those areas in order to attract and retain the resettled populations, as we have seen.<sup>153</sup> In practice, however, income generation for relocation projects in Tibet depends largely on sending residents to other areas of Tibet to seek work elsewhere, usually

in urban areas.<sup>154</sup> This means increasing urbanisation, which is anyway the key focus in the current Chinese model of development, and in particular requires local administrations to increase the number of towns in border areas. Normally those new towns would be developed in locations further away from the borders in order to exploit their better access to existing infrastructural and commercial networks, but it is possible that the Lhodrag county government is creating towns in cross-border areas in order both to boost the economy of the CBVs and to achieve its border urbanisation target at the same time.

A third consideration is funding. Constructing the villages is extraordinarily expensive, given that local officials are expected to follow the model demonstrated at Jieluobu. This requires major investment not just in construction but in the provision of infrastructure, power supplies, income generation schemes and subsidies, which is unusually difficult given the remoteness and altitude of the villages. These costs are funded primarily by Beijing. This leads to the hypothesis that much of this hyper-rapid development may be driven not by security needs, but by the availability of funds for border development and the eagerness of local bureaucrats to access them. Xi Jinping's Tibet policy is centred on achieving border security,<sup>155</sup> and policy makers in China have concluded that the economic development of border areas is a prerequisite for enhancing and maintaining national security in those areas. If local officials can argue to the centre that these villages, townships and towns are needed for security reasons, however remote the reasoning behind that argument, it seems likely that they will get the necessary funding from Beijing. In theory, the construction surge could be thus be seen as a form of administrative rent-seeking.

Fourthly, there may have been a change in China's strategic calculations regarding the Beyul and the Menchuma. During the first two phases of CBV construction in those areas, it was assumed by outside commentators that the level and extent of construction would continue to be primarily symbolic, given the possibility that China would return those areas to Bhutan once it agreed to China's proposed exchange. This in turn implied that, since these areas had been occupied to impose negotiating pressure on Thimphu, they were not of strategic importance to China or its military. China's military priorities are related to its ongoing conflict with India, not Bhutan, and – unlike the Doklam plateau in Bhutan's western sector – the Beyul and Menchuma do not provide immediate access to India.

This calculation may, however, have changed. Both these areas are on the south face of the Himalayan crest, and provide enhanced locations for observation and listening. Soon after occupying the Upper Jakarlung, China constructed a radome (a structure housing a radar or similar apparatus) on a ridge overlooking Majiatang,<sup>156</sup> as well as a satellite receiving facility of some kind on a ridge overlooking the Pagsamlung.<sup>157</sup> In addition, the road along the Lower Jakarlung is now only 8kms from Jasabi, the nearest settlement in Bhutan, which is linked to Bhutan's road network. In theory, though technically difficult to achieve, if the Jakarlung road could be completed, it could provide access via the Bhutan road system to the Indian border at Nganglam, 120kms to the south.<sup>158</sup> One online Chinese commentator has also recently argued that the Beyul could “serve as a commanding height” in any future conflict with India because it is only 50kms as the crow flies from the Indian border near Tawang, a major strategic location that was an important target for China during the 1962 Indo-China war.<sup>159</sup>

These factors still do not fully explain why China is spending such vast amounts on the construction surge in the Beyul, given its remoteness and other factors. But they strongly suggest that by 2023, if not 2020, China had concluded that its settlement of the Jakarlung valleys and Menchuma was irreversible. Although other elements of the package deal were still in place, the chance of these settled territories ever being returned to Bhutan had become remote.

## Part 3: CBV Construction in Western Bhutan

The pattern of CBV development in the western sector of Bhutan is relatively clear. There, China's objectives have been focused on acquiring and securing the Doklam plateau and adjoining areas, rather than on using CBV construction as a reversible land seizure for use as a pressure tactic on Bhutan. The CBVs in the western sector thus have a clear "consolidating" function in terms of China's sovereignty-assertion and its perceived security needs. This is evident from the strategic siting of western-sector villages: each of the villages, apart from one, is sited in a separate valley or on a ridge overlooking a valley that China claims in the western sector. Their function is thus relatively clear, and so far only one (Pangda) has been expanded beyond its initial size.

### The Chinese Claim in the Western Sector

The area currently claimed by China in Bhutan's west is a narrow strip of mountainous territory, roughly 40kms from north to south and on average some 12–15kms from west to east. Unofficial Chinese commentators say that the disputed area covers 594 sq kms. The area includes seven valleys that are currently within three chiwogs (village blocks) in Bhutan: Choempa\_Jamgoen chiwog in Bji gewog, Chenpa\_Gaychhukha chiwog also in Bji gewog, and Nakha\_Tashigang chiwog in Sangbay gewog. Both Bji and Sangbay gewogs are within Haa dzongkhag.

Five of these valleys claimed by China are formed by tributary rivers on the eastern side of the Amo chu or Torsa river, which in Chinese is referred to as the Kongbumaqu or the Chunpi (Chumbi) qu, or sometimes as the Yadong qu. The Amo chu runs from the Himalayas in the north through the Tibetan (now Chinese) area of Yadong, known as the Chumbi valley, to the Indian plains in the south. Using their Dzongkha names, these five tributaries of the Amo chu, from the north, are the Shakhatoe, the Dramana, the Langmarpo (which is sometimes referred by the Bhutanese and others as Sinchulungpa,

after the plateau that lies at the source of the Langmarpo), the Charitang, and the Yak.

Chinese sources refer to the valleys or drainage systems formed by these five tributaries as Jiwu, Chamapu, Langmapu, Qia'ertang and Lulin. 160 Official Chinese maps show the main valleys of each of these five river basins as within China's territory, including the peaks on either side of each valley and the terrain up to the source of each river or the watershed above it.

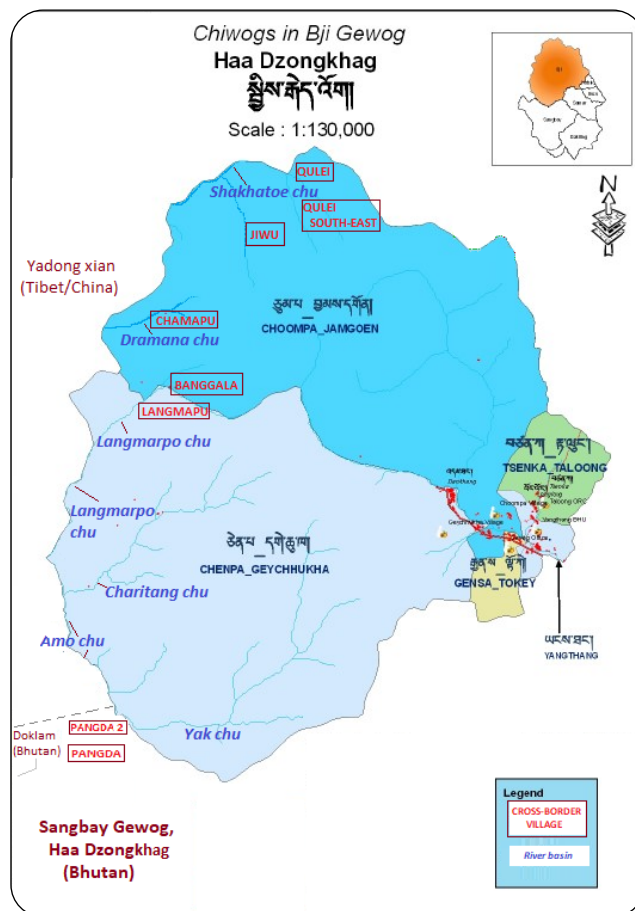
In addition, China claims two other areas in the western sector. One is the valley formed by the Torsa nala, which China refers to as the Doklam qu or Doklam river, a tributary on the western side of the Amo chu. The other is the valley of the Amo chu down to its confluence with the Torsa nala. These two claims are of particular importance, because China also claims the ridges on either side of those two valleys and their watersheds. This thus includes the land surrounding the source of the Torsa nala, which is the Doklam plateau. These two valleys and the plateau are shown on official Bhutanese maps as part of Nakha\_Tashigang chiwog, a subdivision of Haa dzongkhag's Sangbay gewog. Acquiring control of the high ridge running along the south of the Doklam plateau, known in Dzongkha as the Zompelri ridge, is said by many commentators to be the principal objective of China's strategic moves in Bhutan, including its various border claims and construction drives.

China thus claims seven valleys or areas in western Bhutan, together with their surrounding ridges and upper drainage systems. However, China has not initiated the process of establishing "actual control" in any form in two of these seven areas – the Charitang (Qia'ertang) and the Yak (Lulin) valleys. It has also not attempted to establish a presence in the upper reaches of the Langmarpo valley, which it also claims (this area, properly speaking, includes Sinchulungpa and Chamarp, though these names are frequently used for downstream areas).

The absence of Chinese intervention in the two large valley systems of the Charitang and the Yak, as well as in the Upper Langmarpo, has led unofficial Chinese commentators to conclude that China is signalling that it will give up its claim to these areas as a “reward” or “incentive” to Bhutan if Bhutan cedes other territories that China is claiming. Like the claims to Pagsamlung and Chagdzom in the north-eastern sector, the claim to these valleys can be seen as low-cost demands that can later be dropped to give the impression of making concessions.

case of the three claimed tributary valleys on the west of the Amo chu, which include large grazing areas, China has followed the six stages of sovereignty assertion, beginning in many cases with sending herders into claimed areas to claim grazing rights, and concluding with the construction of villages in these areas. It has completed this six-stage process in the Shakhatoe, Dramana, and the Lower Langmarpo valleys. With the mid-Amo chu, where there was little space for grazing, it has established control through the stages of road, outpost and village construction.

China’s strategy since the 1990s has thus been gradually to acquire “actual control” of the remaining three claimed tributary valleys in the western sector, in the valley of the mid-Amo chu, and on the Doklam plateau. In the



[Fig. 33. The two chiwogs of Choomba\_Jamgoen and Chenpa\_Geychhukha in Bji gewog, in Haa dzongkhag. The names of the five main rivers (chu) that flow into the Amo chu from the east have been added by the author in blue, together with the names of CBVs in red. The western edge of the two chiwogs shows Bhutan’s understanding of the border with China in this area. Based on: Election Commission of Bhutan, Local Government Constituency Map, Haa dzongkhag, 2011, <https://www.ecb.bt/2011/finaldelimitation/Haa.pdf>. Names of rivers and valleys are not shown on the source map.]

In the fifth area, that of the Torsa nala and its watershed, the Doklam plateau, China began the process by claiming historic grazing rights, but went on quickly to establish its presence there primarily through military operations and the construction of roads, military facilities, and barracks. There it has faced military pushback from Indian troops, though only when it attempted to gain control of the southernmost section of the plateau, leading to a 73-day stand-off between the two armies in the summer of 2017. In the end both armies withdrew without incident, leaving China so far without complete access to the southern and most important part of the plateau. But the Indians had not intervened while China established roads or military facilities in the northern two-thirds of the plateau, either before or after the 2017 face-off. China has thus completed five of the six stages of its strategy in the northernmost two-thirds of the plateau – that is, it has established outposts and built roads, but not villages, in that part of the plateau.

The eight CBVs in the western sector are sited in one or other of the five valleys which China is actively seeking to control, located either in one of those valleys or between two of them. They indicate the achievement by China of “actual control” and the completion of all or most of its six-stage program for asserting sovereignty in each of those valleys.

These CBVs form a 36km-long line running from north to south, crossing the Himalayan or sub-Himalayan ridges that divide each of the five valleys, with an average of 5.3kms between each village. The two southernmost villages, Pangda (which includes Pangda 3) and Pangda 2, are situated in the narrow gorge of the Amo Chu. Pangda 2 is located directly below a major military base on the eastern edge of the Doklam plateau, which gives China control over the northern part of the Torsa nala valley.

**Table 9: Strategic placement of CBVs in the western sector**

Valley (Dzongkha names) Listed from north to south	Valley (Chinese names)	CBV in valley (Chinese names)	CBV in upper valley or on ridge (Chinese names)
Shakhatoe (between two valleys)	Jiwu	Qulei	Qulei South-east Jiwu (Caitangga)
Dramana (between two valleys)	Chamapu	Chamapu (Sairubu-Lerigang)	Banggala
Langmarpo (Sinchulungpa)	Langmapu	Langmapu	
[Charitang – no activity]	[Qia’ertang]		
[Yak – no activity]	]Lulin]		
Torsa nala (Doklam chu)	Donglang		Pangda 2
The mid-Amo chu	Kongbuqumaqu	Pangda 1	



three other CBVs were constructed in the western sector, starting with the northernmost one at Qulei and working south. In Phase 3, three more CBVs were constructed in the southern half of the disputed area. These were completed by the autumn of 2022. No obvious signs of major construction have been observed since that time.

## Phase 1. Key village construction, 2020

### CBV1: Pangda

In January 2019, China began building a road down the Amo chu, south of Asang village, the point generally understood until that time to be the Chinese border with Bhutan. The area had until then been part of Nakha\_Tashigang chiwog in Sangbay gewog, Haa dzongkhag, in the western corner of Bhutan. By the end of that year, the new road had reached the confluence of the Amo chu with the Torsa nala, 10 kms to the south, where China now places its border with Bhutan. Work began on building a military post at the confluence, named on some maps as the Asang outpost. By January 2020, China had begun work on constructing Pangda, its first CBV in the western sector of Bhutan. The new village, located on a 7,000 sq ms site 1.7kms south of the original border, is on the new road leading to the Asang outpost and was named as Pangda. It provides China with control over the mid-Amo chu. Situated just south of the confluence of the Yak chu with the Amo chu, it provides oversight of any movement from Bhutan along the Yak chu and Amo chu valleys.



[Fig. 34. Visiting officials accompany Tibetan relocatees in singing at the opening ceremony of Pangda village on China's national day, October 1, 2020. Source: Chen Qi, “洞朗地区第一村——庞达村” (The first village in the Donglang [Doklam] area – Pangda village), 南海的波涛 (Waves of the South China Sea), November 19, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/C6-hv7xhTRFhvSZPEb15Bw>.]

When Pangda was formally opened, it consisted of 28 single-unit buildings and two public buildings, used for offices, shops and production. It includes a kindergarten (the first sign that there are children among the residents of a CBV), a primary school “teaching point” (usually a term referring to a village school, often part-time), and a “central landscape garden”.<sup>161</sup> The first 27 households, comprising 124 residents, were moved into the new houses in September 2020. The opening of Pangda was publicised in the Chinese media, describing the arrival of the first residents in the village, and emphasising the facilities provided for these residents. This media campaign was similar to the earlier publicity within China about the relocation of residents to Jieluobu in the north-eastern sector three years earlier. With Pangda, however, for the first time, publicity about the village appeared in English, in the form of a Twitter posting by a Chinese official.<sup>162</sup> The Twitter posting was presumably intended to attract international attention. Again, Chinese official media and social media coverage of Pangda did not indicate that the village was in disputed territory or within Bhutan.<sup>163</sup>



[Fig. 35. Posting on Twitter by @shen\_shiwei, a PRC journalist with the Chinese TV broadcaster CGTN, celebrating the arrival of the first relocatees at Pangda, October 2020. The top left inset photograph shows the new residents at a ceremony in the village marking China's National Day. The Twitter (now X) account has 100,000 followers. Source: <https://x.com/VishnuNDTV/status/1329429012251254786>, November 19, 2020.]

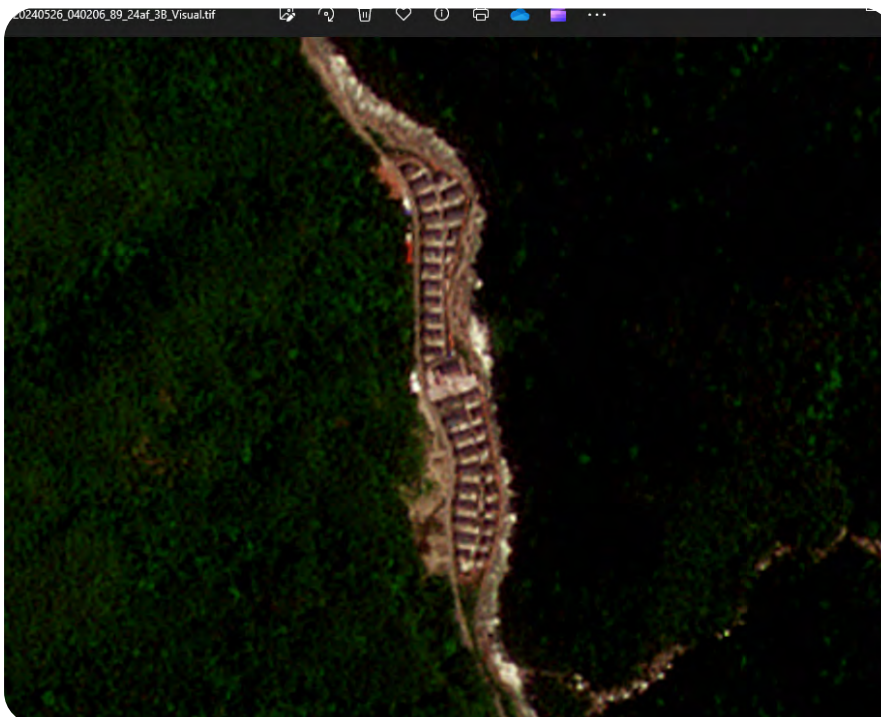
## Phase 2: Four new villages, 2020-21

### CBV2: Pangda 2

From late 2020 until the end of 2021, China carried out the construction of four additional villages in the western sector of Bhutan. The first of these, usually known as Pangda 2, is 1km to the north of Pangda and was named in Chinese media reports as Pangda Phase II. It lies on the west bank of the Amo chu, just 200m south of the original border point between China and Bhutan on the Amo chu. It lies between the confluences of two tributaries on the eastern side of the Amo chu, the Gampala chu and the Yak chu. Immediately above Pangda 2, to its west, 400m higher in altitude, is a major military complex or barracks on the far eastern edge of the Doklam plateau, which had been built in 2017. Work began on the Pangda 2 site in October 2020, and by October the following year, Pangda 2 had 18 residential buildings containing 26 housing units and one public building.

### CBV3: Qulei

In 2005, the representatives from Haa Dzongkhag to Bhutan's National Assembly reported that the Chinese, having constructed a mule track towards the former Bhutanese military outpost at Shabu (Ch.: Xiabu) in the Shakhatoe valley some years earlier, had upgraded this track to a motorable road.<sup>164</sup> The Bhutanese government issued a formal protest about the road to the Chinese, who stopped the construction work. But by October 2019, road construction had resumed and in April 2021 work began on constructing a village in the Shakhatoe valley. It would become the northernmost of the CBVs in the western sector. It is located at the confluence of three tributaries that form the headwaters of the Shakhatoe, named on Chinese maps as the Yarepo, the Yarepu and the Cainong; the Dzongkha names of these rivers are not known.



[Fig. 36. Pangda 2, on the mid-Amo chu, in an image captured on May 26, 2024. Source: Planet Lab.]

The village is a cluster of subsidiary villages, with 100m or so between them. The subsidiary villages are named on Chinese maps as Jialechi, Qulei (or Qule), and Qulin. Foreign observers have so far used the name Qulei to refer to this cluster. In total, the Qulei cluster has 62 residential buildings containing 216 housing units, as well as 10 public buildings. The cluster is just 2kms east of the original China-Bhutan border and the same distance west of China's newly claimed border. Its position at the confluence of the three tributary valleys governs any attempt at access from Bhutan along those valleys.

#### **CBV4: Jiwu (Caitangga)**

The third of the new villages constructed in 2021 is 4kms to the south-west of the Qulei cluster, on a traditional Bhutanese pastureland known as Tshethangkha.<sup>165</sup> It lies on the west bank of a river called the Yalapu chu, another tributary of the Shakhatoe. A trail runs along the Yalapu valley, leading from Bhutan, and a Chinese military outpost, named on Chinese maps as Semujong or Semuzong (Tibetan/Dzongkha: Gser mo ljongs), had been built in the Yalapu valley in 2012, presumably to monitor that trail and the pass 5kms to the south. In late 2020 the Chinese completed a road connecting the Dramana valley to Semujong in the Yalapu valley. By June

the following year, work had begun on the construction of a village on the Tshethangkha pastureland (called Caitangga in Chinese), 400m north of the Semujong outpost. The village at Caitangga would become the largest of all CBVs so far built by China in Bhutan.

In terms of accommodation, Jiwu (Caitangga) has 330 housing units arranged in 88 residential buildings or blocks, as well as 12 public buildings.

Recent articles in the Chinese media refer to the village as Jiwu, which is the name of the larger area or valley (Gi'u in Dzongkha) within which the Shakhatoe and its tributary, the Yalapu, are situated. Jiwu (Caitangga) is 4.5kms east of the original China-Bhutan border and a similar distance west of China's newly claimed border with Bhutan. It is midway between the Chamapu (Sairubu-Lerigang) CBV cluster located on the Dramana to its south and the Qulei cluster on the Shakhatoe to its north.



[Fig. 37. Qulei village cluster as shown in an image captured on December 20, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=89.10491%2C27.60466%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]



[Fig. 38. Jiwu (Caitangga) village, the largest of all the cross-border villages, as shown in an image captured on December 20, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=89.08162%2C27.57010%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]



[Fig. 39. Local police explaining safety issues to a scooter rider in Jiwu (Caitangga) during a police drive in the village to “go deep into the masses’ homes, ‘chat about family matters’, and understand social conditions and public opinion”. Source: 亚东县公安局持续开展“包乡包村”工作 (Yadong County Public Security Bureau continues to carry out “Village and Township” work), 亚东公安 (Yadong Public Security) Weixin channel, November 3, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dRwf1glHum7-DDGt0TRyXA>]

## **CBV5: Chamapu (Sairubu-Lerigang)**

The fourth of the CBVs in the western sector built in 2021 is beside a locality named on maps in Chinese as Sairubu, and sometimes as Lerigang. We now know, by analysing photographs of the surrounding landscape, that it is officially called Chamapu by the Chinese authorities. As noted earlier, official Chinese media articles published at county level began to refer to the “Chamapu Relocation Site” or the “Chamapu Well-off Border Village” from early 2023.

The village is on the north bank of the Dramana river, 5.5kms to the south-west of Jiwu (Caitangga). It is just 1km east of the original China-Bhutan border and 2kms west of China’s newly claimed border. The Chamapu CBV represents China’s claim to ownership of the Dramana valley and its drainage system, including the ridges on either side.

Like Qulei, Chamapu is a village cluster, consisting of three subsidiary villages, with about 100m between the sub-villages. These sub-villages are named separately on Chinese maps as Sairubu, Jitang and Chamatang. Together, they consist of 47 residential buildings which contain 182 housing units, as well as six public buildings.

A 3.6km road has been built to the east, leading to an isolated building, probably an outpost or checkpoint of some kind. The building is just 800m from the ridge that marks China’s newly claimed border with Bhutan, near a trail that runs from Damthang in Bhutan, 15kms to the south-east, where Bhutan has an army outpost.



[Fig. 40. Chamapu (Sairubu-Lerigang) village cluster as shown in an image captured on December 31, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=89.03318%2C27.53199%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]



[Fig. 41. Police from Yadong county visit Chamapu, where they donate “jackets, school bags, books, hats and scarves worth 9,900 yuan to 26 students and 3 teachers at the kindergarten at the relocation site, sending deep love to the children and letting them feel the special warmth of Yadong Public Security in the cold winter.” Source: “亚东县公安局开展“寒冬时节送温暖 浓浓关爱暖童心”主题党日活动” (Yadong County Public Security Bureau held a themed party day activity of “Sending warmth in the cold winter and caring for children”), 亚东公安 (Yadong Public Security) Weixin channel, December 19, 2023, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/thTW1UREEYGaSVy\\_3j0IFg](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/thTW1UREEYGaSVy_3j0IFg).]

### Phase 3: Three additional CBVs, 2021-22

#### CBV6: Qulei South-east

In late 2021, construction started on three more villages or village clusters in the western sector. The northernmost of these villages was a village just 400m to the south-east of the Qulei cluster. It is not named on Chinese maps, and we refer to it as Qulei South-east. It is a single village situated on the east bank of the Yarepu chu, one of the tributaries that feeds into the headwaters of the Shakhatoe, but it sits at the confluence of the Yarepu with another valley, not named on available maps, that provides access from a pass into Bhutan, 2kms to the east. The construction of Qulei South-east was completed by December 2022, when the village had 3 public buildings and 31 residential buildings, which included 113 housing units.

#### CBV7: Banggala

In the centre of the Chumbi (Yadong) valley, within China's acknowledged borders, is a village called Rubinkha (Ch.: Rubingang), adjoining what is now called Xiayadong in Chinese, or Lower Yadong. Rubinkha is 3kms west of the original Bhutanese border with China. Just above it, on an eastern slope, a major Chinese military base has been built, referred to by the Bhutanese as the Wuchu dmag khang or military base. The traditional border ran along a mountain ridge above that base on the east side of the valley, known as the Pangka la, or Banggala in Chinese.<sup>166</sup> The Bhutanese had a small military outpost on that ridge.

In 2004, China started to construct a road from the Wuchu base up to the ridge. Road construction was halted after a protest by the Bhutanese government, but by at least 2012, if not earlier, the road to the ridge had been completed. By late 2019, China had built an outpost on the ridge, known as the Banggala Outpost. By then the ridge was no longer treated by China as a border; the Bhutanese outpost must have been vacated, but it remains unclear when or how the Chinese achieved that.



[Fig. 42. Qulei South-east as shown in an image captured on December 20, 2023. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=64776&mapCenter=89.11673%2C27.59872%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]

At 4,450m above sea level, that ridge provided a full view of two important valleys claimed by China in Bhutan: the Dramana and the Upper Langmarpo, as well as the Sinchulungpa plateau at the upper end of the Langmarpo. The ridge looked down on a small Bhutanese military outpost on the Upper Langmarpo. The Dramana and the Upper Langmarpo valleys and the Sinchulungpa plateau are among the areas claimed by China, but so far among those three areas only the Dramana has been annexed and settled. The latter two areas are still held by Bhutan.

In September 2021, construction work began on a new village some 200m from the Chinese outpost on the Banggala ridge. It is the only CBV in the western sector that is positioned on a mountain ridge, rather than in a valley.

By summer 2022, 41 residential buildings and three public buildings were visible at the site. Judging from satellite images, the residential buildings at Banggala provide 126 units of housing.

The village is marked on some unofficial maps as the “Banggala Close-to-the-border Well-off Village”<sup>167</sup> and is sometimes confused with the nearby site known in Chinese as Bangga Quzhen (帮嘎曲登).

## CBV8: Langmarpu

The eighth of the CBVs so far constructed by China in Bhutan’s west is in the Langmarpo valley. Counting from the north, Langmarpo is the third of the five tributaries on the eastern side of the Amo chu whose valleys and watersheds are claimed by China (the two valleys to its north are the Dramana and the Shakhatoe). Near the source of the Upper Langmarpo is the small plateau named Sinchulung or Sinchulungpa, a name that is sometimes used by Bhutanese to refer to the Upper Langmarpo valley and surrounding area as a whole.

Until recent advances by China, Bhutan’s understanding in recent years was that its border ran along the Langmarpo from the confluence with the Amo chu for 6kms. By 2010, however, China had already constructed a road eastwards from the Langmarpo valley into disputed territory, up to the ridge 3kms further east that China considers to be the new border.<sup>168</sup> By 2012, a military outpost had been constructed on that ridge. Known in Chinese as the Duosilinma or Puzhenla outpost, and to the Bhutanese as Phutegang, to the east it looks down on two remaining valleys claimed but not annexed or occupied by China: the Charitang and the Yak valleys.

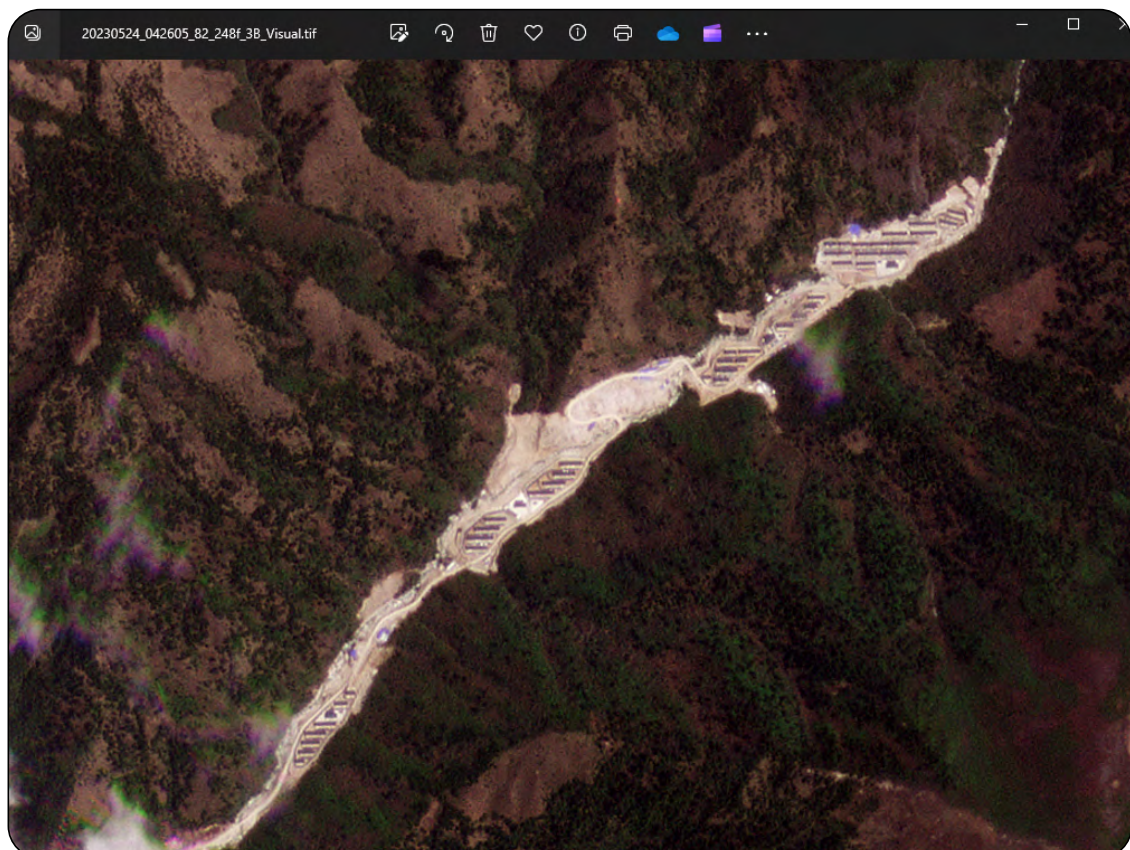


[Fig. 43. Banggala (Pangka la) as shown in an image captured on December 31, 2023. The Banggala military outpost is visible just to the west of the village. Source: ESRI World Imagery Wayback, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=20337&mapCenter=89.01030%2C27.49671%2C17&framesToExclude=6984%2C10%2C11351>. Credit: Esri, © OpenStreetMap contributors, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS.]

This outpost is heavily featured in Chinese media as a site of bravery and dedication by Chinese border guards, including a television documentary which focuses on the bravery of one soldier who sprained an ankle while walking down from the ridge at Puzhenla.<sup>169</sup>

To its west, the outpost overlooks the Lower Langmarpo valley, including the middle reaches that are or were within Bhutan. By May 2020, China had begun constructing a road along the mid-Langmarpo, heading north-east towards the claimed areas upstream. 15 months later, in October 2021, work began on the construction of a village along the mid-Langmarpo. That village, which the Chinese refer to as Langmapu, is, like Chamapu (Sairubu-Lerigang) and Qulei, a cluster of villages, with about 200m between each one. There are four of these subsidiary villages at Langmapu. By the summer of 2022, 10 public buildings and 42 residential buildings were visible, providing an estimated 186 housing units.

The eight CBVs in Bhutan's western sector, unlike those in the north-east, all have strategic logic of some kind in terms of their locations. The Yadong county administration has not followed, so far, the Lhodrag county government's policy of extending existing CBVs, other than the addition of Pangda 3 to Pangda in August 2022, which consisted only of six new buildings containing eight residential units. There is no sign of any policy of concentrated urbanisation or of construction with no evident strategic purpose within the annexed areas in the western sector. Logically, a policy of consolidating physical and administrative presence would have made more sense in the western section rather than in the Beyul, since there are no indications that China has any intention to return those western areas. The western CBVs can therefore be understood as driven primarily by the role as symbols of sovereignty assertion. However, without resorting to urbanisation or some similar strategy, Yadong officials are going to face a difficult challenge in creating a sustainable economy for each of the western CBVs.



[Fig. 44. Langmapu village cluster on the lower Langmarpo river, in an image captured on May 24, 2023. Source: Planet Lab.]



[Fig. 45. The Duosilinma or Puzhenla military outpost, constructed by the Chinese authorities in 2012 on the ridge to the east of Langmapu village to give oversight of Bhutan's Charitang and Yak valleys. Source: “普珍拉‘桃花源’记” (The Story of Peach Blossom Spring at Puzhenla), 解放军生活 (Life in the People's Liberation Army) Weixin channel, June 30, 2017, <https://m.fx361.com/news/2017/0630/1984085.html>.]



[Fig. 46. The village office at “Langmapu Border Moderately Well-off Village” during an inspection visit by the Yadong county Party Secretary, who had “a cordial discussion with the cadres and staff of the Langmapu Party Working Committee” about “key tasks such as promoting national unity and progress, promoting economic and social development, building an ecological civilization highland, and consolidating borders, developing borders, and enriching the people.” Source: “主题教育 | 扎西次仁深入边境小康村开展走访调研活动” (Thematic Education | Tashi Tsering visits and investigates well-off villages in border areas),

亚东县权威发布 (Yadong County Authoritative Release) Weixin channel, October 29, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/NfZqc5XnBwHgXJ96667snQ>.]

## Part 4: The Discovery of the CBVs and Governmental Responses

As far as is known, no overseas observers or researchers were aware that China was building villages in traditional Bhutanese territory until 2020, four years after the construction process had begun. There are also no indications that any foreign governments were aware of these developments until that time. It is not even clear that Bhutan or India were aware of the new villages, particularly those in the north-east, until reports of their existence appeared in international media. Chinese media reported in May 2021 that Bhutan “has lodged no complaints with China about the alleged border incursions” in the Beyul or Menchuma,<sup>170</sup> a possible indication that Thimphu was not aware of the new villages up to that time.

The first report that China had constructed a CBV in what was conventionally understood to be Bhutanese territory was published in November 2020 by the Indian media outlet, NDTV.<sup>171</sup> That report described just one village – that of Pangda. The Bhutanese government, through a statement by its ambassador in New Delhi, immediately denied the Pangda report.<sup>172</sup> This prompted online speculation that Bhutan had already ceded the territory that included Pangda – the area around the mid-Amo chu – to China. That speculation has not been substantiated, but some Bhutanese officials have indicated privately a general sense that Bhutan’s border claims in the western sector are to some extent open to discussion.<sup>173</sup> That view could be read into a comment on the Pangda claim by Bhutan’s ambassador: “Bhutan and China do not negotiate based on ‘Google Map’ but [on] claim lines based on detailed cartographic maps and ground features. Each side has its own maximalist claim lines.”<sup>174</sup> In addition, the historian Tsering Shakya has noted that Bhutan acquired the western valleys now claimed by China relatively recently as the result of a grant by the 13th Dalai Lama

to the then Bhutanese ruler in 1913, the documentation of which has not been made public.<sup>175</sup>

By contrast, the Bhutanese government is said to view its border in the north-east sector as firmly established, a position that is supported by historical accounts. This was reflected in the very different response by the Bhutanese authorities to the first reports of CBVs in that sector. Those reports were published by our team in May and July 2021 in the US journal *Foreign Policy*.<sup>176</sup> These reports documented in detail for the first time the construction of two CBVs, Jieliobu and Minjiuna, in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan and described a third CBV, Demalong, that was under construction at that time. The Bhutanese government declined to make any comment on these reports. Since Thimphu had immediately refuted the report that Pangda was in Bhutanese territory, its silence concerning the report of the three north-eastern CBVs appeared in context to be tantamount to a confirmation.

In January 2022, details of four more CBVs were published by the Reuters news agency.<sup>177</sup> Again, the Bhutanese government, approached by journalists for its views, made no comment,<sup>178</sup> again a seeming indication that the reports were probably correct.

Two and a half years after news of the CBVs in the north-east was first revealed, and more than a year after news emerged of the additional CBVs in the west, the Bhutanese government gave its first response to those reports. In March 2023, the then Prime Minister of Bhutan told a Belgian newspaper, *La Libre Belgique*, that media reports of CBVs in Bhutan were untrue.<sup>179</sup> He gave no further details. This was Bhutan’s first, and so far only, comment on the CBVs apart from the November 2020 denial that Pangda was in Bhutan’s territory. Since the Prime Minister’s comment to the Belgian press, Bhutanese officials have refused to comment on any reports about Chinese-built CBVs in their territory.<sup>180</sup>

In or just after December 2023, new satellite images were published by Chatham House and NDTV showing a significant increase in construction activity in the Upper and Lower Jakarlung valleys in the Beyul.<sup>181</sup> An article published by Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* in February 2024 also included similar images showing extensive

new construction activity in those valleys (in addition, it claimed to have identified a new village called Tamalung, but this was an error for the already identified village of Demalong).<sup>182</sup>

## China's response

In November 2020, China's semi-official outlet, Global Times, published an article in English refuting the NDTV claim that Pangda was within Bhutan. The article included maps showing China's claim line together with statements by the PRC government detailing the historical basis of its claims in the west of Bhutan.<sup>183</sup> In May 2021, China's state broadcaster, CGTN, published a response by Chinese media to the report in Foreign Policy that China had built villages in the north-eastern sector of Bhutan.<sup>184</sup> This CGTN article was relatively brief and attacked the supposed purpose of the reports rather than their content. It said that "China has not built villages on Bhutanese territory", but gave no explanation or argument as to why the claims about the villages were incorrect, saying only "the claims in this article are easily refuted," while not doing so.

China denies that the CBVs are across its international border: it says categorically that they are within China. It never refers publicly to these areas as disputed territory and does not suggest that there is any alternative view about the location of the border. It therefore in effect denies that they are in disputed territory. That these villages are in territory that China has only recently "recovered" from Bhutan, is, however, discussed in great detail and celebrated by Chinese citizens on social media, and in particular by anonymous but apparently well-informed online specialists on China's border issues, primarily the influential blogger Menghuihutu, who also publishes under the handle @1002Shenme.

## Other governments

For nearly four years after the first report of Chinese CBVs in north-eastern Bhutan, there was silence from governments other than Bhutan or China about the reports of Chinese encroachment into Bhutan. The government of India, which for many decades acted as Bhutan's security guarantor, to date has made no comment on the reports.

It was only in October 2023 that an agency of a foreign government referred for the first time to the Chinese CBVs within Bhutan. That agency was the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate (J06), a part of the US government that provides legal guidance to the US military's Indo-Pacific Command. The discussion of the CBVs appeared in two reports published by that agency as part of a series of 26 briefing documents advising the US military on specific legal questions.<sup>185</sup> The first report, issued in October 2023, said that China's cross-border construction programme may "embolden the PRC to assert that disputed areas are no longer in dispute" and that, by "surreptitiously establishing effective control through construction or occupation" the PRC might use the exercise of "effective control of disputed areas...as evidence of the primacy of its claims". The document also noted that the "Russian Federation relied on similar – albeit more blatantly hostile – land-grab tactics in Ukraine as a way to establish a false legal pretext...to coerce dispute resolution on favourable terms."<sup>186</sup>

In March 2024 the same agency issued a much more detailed TACAID report on and legal analysis of China's cross-border construction in Bhutan.<sup>187</sup> The analysis was based on accounts of the first three CBVs in the north-eastern sector, in particular the cases of Jiuluobu and Minjiuma. It noted that, under international law, occupation "cannot lawfully be used as a means to acquire territorial sovereignty" and judges that, based on these cases, "the rules that apply to occupation ... merit consideration based on the PRC's actions."<sup>188</sup>

These documents were the first and so far the only known comments by any foreign government or governmental agency relating to the CBVs in Bhutan. The publication of the US military reports was not noted or reported by any media.

As far is known, no politicians, officials or parliamentarians from any country have made any public comment on China's cross-border construction in Bhutan, apart from the formal denials by Bhutan's ambassador in New Delhi and the former Prime Minister.

## Concessions by Bhutan

The two-and-a-half-year silence by the Bhutanese authorities between November 2020 and March 2023 about the CBVs in the north-east has led to speculation about a possible change in Bhutan's border policy since those villages were first reported. This speculation suggests that those CBVs were considered by Bhutan to have been built in Bhutanese territory at the time when they were built. In around 2022 or 2023, however, according to this theory, the then Bhutanese government may have agreed to cede some of the relevant areas to China. This has not been explicitly stated by Bhutan, and in any case could change under the current government.

However, it would not be the first time that Bhutan has ceded territory to China. It had to do so in two well attested cases in the past, once in the 1950s and again in the 1980s. The first of these cases was in 1959, when China unilaterally seized the eight or more enclaves Bhutan had ruled within Tibet for some three centuries.<sup>189</sup> The other case was in the 1980s, when Bhutan ceded the far northern area of Kula Khari to China, said to cover some 1,290 sq kms. Bhutan did not announce the ceding of that area to China until several years later, when it told the National Assembly that the area had been included in its maps in error.<sup>190</sup> Other cases are less well documented, but it appears that in 1955, acting on Indian advice, Bhutan reportedly ceded 45 sq kms of western Haa to China.<sup>191</sup> Online Chinese commentators claim that more recently Bhutan has also ceded a 60-sq km area called Ningtu on its western border.<sup>192</sup> The same commentators say Bhutan has also ceded a 150-sq km area at the Mela pass, an important location on its eastern border, close to the highly strategic town of Tawang in India's Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>193</sup> Neither of these claims have been confirmed by Bhutan.

Commentators on Wikipedia have suggested that an area of Haa dzongkhag called Kongbu in Chinese, on the northwest (right) bank of the Lower Langmarpo, may have been ceded by Bhutan to China.<sup>194</sup> For at least two decades, Bhutan officials have said that "the traditional boundary in this area lay along Langmarpo Chhu,"<sup>195</sup> meaning that the boundary did not include the Kongbu ridge, but it is the case that this area, covering about 19 sq kms, was shown as part of Bhutan in maps up until at least the 1950s.

A much more significant concession appears to be that involving Menchuma. Since the early 2000s, Bhutan no longer includes the Menchuma plateau and valley within its maps, suggesting that Bhutan may also have quietly ceded that territory to China, as discussed above (see CBV2: Minjiuma).

The loss of former territories, although possibly due to error more than pressure in the case of Kula Khari, and often related to border negotiations with India rather than China, has led to concern within Bhutan. In 2006, a representative to the National Assembly raised the issue with the government, noting that "the past record showed that Bhutan had an area of more than 46,000 square kilometres but the present figure has decreased to 38,000 square kilometres". The members, according to the official summary, "expressed their reservations as to why the area kept reducing while boundary discussions [with China and India] were still going on."<sup>196</sup> The government in its response explained the history of its work on border issues and negotiations but did not provide information about changes in the size of Bhutan.

# Conclusion

There may be multiple factors behind China's decision to use village construction as a tool of policy in a neighbouring country's territory, whether disputed or not. In some cases, it is indeed possible that local communities within Tibet may have felt aggrieved that their access to ancestral grazing rights had been lost. Local officials may have seen advantage in encouraging such sentiments and may then have raised the issue with the central Chinese authorities, leading to formal claims by China regarding Bhutanese territory. Local administrations in Tibet, under orders to create new border villages, may have sought to improve their careers or boost funding by inventing risks to China from across the border with Bhutan and by overperforming against central government expectations in relating to imagined risks. But even these scenarios would not explain the resort by the central Chinese authorities to a strategy involving construction in a disputed area and appropriation of a neighbour's land.

Nor would they explain why China needed to go to the extraordinary expense of constructing, populating and servicing CBVs to achieve its goals: if it really felt justified in seizing disputed territory, it could have done so without the extraordinary effort involved in building settlements and paying settlers to move into them. In theory, given that Bhutan has limited defence resources and that India has shown little interest in Bhutan's border issues beyond Doklam, China could have just quietly sent a few herders with their yaks, a handful of soldiers and some road-construction teams to acquire these areas. The sixth stage of sovereignty assertion makes sense in a heavily contested, militarised context like the South China Seas or the Indian borderlands, but in uninhabited areas of Bhutan, recourse to such actions, besides being illegal in international law and an abrogation of a bilateral agreement, has no utility. Indeed, China annexed the Pagsamlung valley without building villages or populating the valley, and without even showing Pagsamlung as part of China on its maps. If the aim was, as it seemed, to pressurise Bhutan, the herders and their yaks, followed by a few officials and road builders, were seemingly all that was needed. The annexed territories could then more easily be returned should negotiations work out.

This suggests that the use of CBVs, in the context of Bhutan, is essentially symbolic. That symbolism is not innocent, however. In this case, Chinese policy-makers seem to have sought to experiment with a little-used and unusually extreme form of diplomatic signalling. In the western sector, the CBV construction program warned Bhutan that it was going to lose the annexed territories whether it conceded them or not, while in the north-eastern sector, at least until late 2022, CBV construction signalled that Bhutan could recover territories of greater cultural and symbolic value than those in the west if it accepted the package deal. With the surge in CBV construction in the north-east since 2023, however, the purpose of village construction in the north-east has shifted from offering a negotiable exchange to announcing a *fait accompli*. The villages now signal not an opportunity but an apparently irreversible loss. What might have previously been categorised by analysts of diplomacy as an exceptionally aggressive form of compellence now appears as the use of brute force.

Critics of India will argue that the hardening of China's negotiating stance was caused by New Delhi preventing Bhutan from working out a diplomatic resolution with Beijing. India has been credibly accused of active involvement in earlier stages of the border dispute, and it resorted to diplomatic coercion of sorts – a blockade on the sale of kerosene – seemingly to influence the Bhutanese election of 2013. It also invoked its treaty rights in the 2017 Doklam confrontation with China. However, very little if anything is known about discussions between India and Bhutan concerning the Bhutan-China border dispute since 2017, and India's position on Bhutan's border issues other than Doklam is unknown. In any case, Beijing must have known from the outset that Bhutan would face difficulties in getting India's agreement for it to cede Doklam. If so, Beijing's demand was likely not made in good faith.

At the very least, from the outset Beijing could have separated its Doklam demand from the other border questions, instead of using relatively non-contentious claims as leverage to advance a highly provocative one. Such a separation of issues is in effect exactly what Bhutan has now asked for by saying, in March 2023, that China's non-Doklam border claims should be treated as bilateral issues while the Doklam case should be dealt with through trilateral discussions. And there are no indications so far that India would have or has objected to Bhutan exchanging the non-Doklam territories with China. If so, China could well have avoided decades of delay by separating its contentious from its non-contentious claims from the outset. This suggests that the overall design of China's border claim was likely from the outset to provoke delay and confrontation.

Even if China is given the benefit of the doubt by assuming that its border claims might have a good-faith basis, fundamental questions remain. Why would China advance claims on areas which, apart from Doklam, are apparently of limited strategic value and which are, in terms of year-round residence, all but uninhabitable? Why would it resort to what is basically intimidation with a small state that purportedly it regards as a friend, whose reliance on a regional competitor it openly seeks to diminish, and with which it wants to open formal relations? It seems that in this case international norms of territorial integrity and dispute settlement have failed. It also seems, more disturbingly, that the normal logic of friendship-cultivation and alliance-building has been shown to be wrong. China appears to have calculated correctly that it could abrogate the terms of its 1998 agreement with Bhutan and the relevant principles of international behaviour regarding territorial disputes with no cost. In other words, the idea that forceful threats and land appropriation are inimical to friendship has been shown in this case to be wanting in the context of acutely asymmetrical relations, since the lesser party has little option as to its response.

Conventional assumptions about the role of information as a form of deterrence in international relations have also failed, given that it took five years before any government or media became aware that China was building villages across an international border. When that news did emerge, the fact that for three years there was no response or comment by foreign government or politicians,

and very little by media outside India, is also striking. Much as critics have argued concerning the international failure to respond effectively to Russia's seizure of Crimea, the silence regarding China's moves in Bhutan may have emboldened China, contributed to the 2023 surge in CBV construction, and endorsed China's new approach to border management and relations. In addition, the evidence in this case so far suggests that the use by a major power of even the milder stages of incremental sovereignty-assertion is highly effective with a smaller neighbour. We now know that Bhutan quietly gave up the Menchuma area to China, when that area was well attested as its territory, well before China moved to the final stage of its sovereignty-assertion strategy, that of cross-border settlement and construction. Unless a viable diplomatic countermove emerges to the use of cross-border construction as a hard-edged negotiating device, it seems likely that in the future small states neighbouring major powers will continue to find themselves increasingly vulnerable to this strategy.

### Appendix 1: Main CBVs – North-eastern sector

Villages	Single village/ village clusters	Small settlements <10 buildings	Chinese name	Other names	Official status (PRC)	Subsidiary villages within cluster	Includes an Industrial zone	Under construction	Has a public square/bldg	Valley	Altitude (metres asl)	Coordinates
Jieluobu	Cluster		杰罗布	Gyalaphug (Rgyal la phug), Chiliphug (Byi li phug), Cheliphug (Bye li phug)	Administrative village	4	Yes		Yes	Upper Jakarlung	4,371	27.980307, 90.898648
Gangbatang	Single village		岗巴塘	Gambatang, Jieluobu South-west	Unknown				Yes	Upper Jakarlung	4,383	27.9808599, 90.8924807
		Unnamed settlement between Jieluobu and Mabjathang			Unknown				No	Upper Jakarlung	4,291	27.979319, 90.911476
		Majiathang (old)	马家塘	Mabjathang (Rma bya thang)	Unknown				No	Upper Jakarlung	4,243	27.977963, 90.922146
Majiatang new	Single village		马家塘	Mabjathang 2	Unknown			Yes	Not completed	Upper Jakarlung	4,248	27.9752019, 90.9259838
Basanglong new village	Single village		巴桑隆村	Pasamlung (dpag bsam lung), Pasanglung, Basangnong, Basangzai, Basangzi	Administrative village			Yes	Not completed	Upper Jakarlung	3,827	27.9840282, 90.9788997

Villages	Single village/ village clusters	Small settlements <10 buildings	Chinese name	Other names	Official status (PRC)	Subsidiary villages within cluster	Includes an Industrial zone	Under construction	Has a public square/bldng	Valley	Altitude (metres asl)	Coordinates
Semalong 3	Single village		?		Unknown			Yes	Yes	Upper Jakarlung	3,751	27.986961, 90.989277
Semalong	Village cluster		色玛龙(色玛隆)	Sre'u ma lung	Unknown	2				Upper Jakarlung	3,701	27.9895221, 90.9955638
		Semalong 2	?		Unknown					Upper Jakarlung	3,589	27.990933, 91.006130
Qujielong	Village cluster		曲杰隆	Choegyallung?	Unknown	4		Yes	Not clear	Lower Jakarlung	3,492	27.987563, 91.012356
Demalong	Cluster		德玛隆村	Dermalung (Sder ma lung/ Bde ma lung), Demalung	Administrative village	3	Yes	Yes	Not clear	Lower Jakarlung	3,361	27.970313, 91.016719
Demalong 2	Single village		?	Demalong West	Unknown	2			Not clear	Lower Jakarlung	3379	27.969098, 91.015312

Villages	Single village/ village clusters	Small settlements <10 buildings	Chinese name	Other names	Official status (PRC)	Subsidiary villages within cluster	Includes an Industrial zone	Under construction	Has a public square/bldng	Valley	Altitude (metres asl)	Coordinates
Minjiuma	Single village		民玖玛	Menchuma (Sman chu ma)	Administrative village				Yes	Minjiuma	4,670	28.0369995, 91.2673644
Lower Minjiuma	Single village		?	Lower Menchuma, Menchuma 2, Junitang	Unknown			Yes	Yes	Minjiuma	4,356	28.0296863, 91.2663519
11	7 single villages, 4 clusters	3				15		15		Average of villages >10 bldngs	3,979	

## Appendix 2: Main CBVs – Western Sector

Villages	Single village/ village clusters	Small settlements <10 buildings	Chinese name	Other names	Subsidiary villages within a cluster	Has an industrial zone	Under construction	Has a public square or building	Valley	Altitude (metres asl)	Coordinates
Pangda	Administrative village; cluster		庞达	Pangda 1 (Bang mda', Sbang mda')	2			Yes	Amo chu	2,139	27.3074830, 89.0074939
Pangda 2	Single village		庞达村二期	Pangda Phase II, Pangda North				Yes	Amo chu	2,190	27.3223087, 89.0062486
Langmapu	Village cluster		朗玛浦, 朗玛普.	Langmarpo, Langmarpo 1, Langmarpu (Glang dmar phu, Blang dmar phu)	4			Yes	Middle Langmarpo/ Sinchulungpa	3,595	27.47806, 89.01340
Banggala	Single village		帮嘴拉	Pangka la			Yes	Yes	Upper Langmarpo/ Dramana	4,242	27.4968, 89.0109
Chamapu (Sairubu)	Village cluster		赛如布	Lerigang, Chamatang	3			Yes	Dramana	4,094	27.5320709, 89.0292587
Jiwu (Caitangga)	Single village		彩淌嘎	Jiwu, Gieu (Skye'u), Semujiong (Gser mo ljongs), Shakhatoe, Tshethangkha				Yes	Yalapu-Shakhatoe	4,336	27.5670448, 89.0818798
Qulei	Village cluster		曲勒	Qule, Qulin, Jithang, Chamatang	3			Yes	Shakhatoe	4,286	27.6055256, 89.1027914
Qulei South-east	Single village							Yes	Shakhatoe	4,385	27.59824, 89.11600
8	4 single villages, 4 clusters	0	8		12			8	Average:	3,708	

### Appendix 3: Number of buildings – North-eastern sector

Villages/village clusters and settlements	Subsidiary villages within a cluster	Valley	Altitude: Main villages	Altitude: subsidiary villages & small settlements	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages; estimates)	Housing units within blocks (estimates)	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
Jieluobu (administrative village; cluster)		Upper Jakarlung	4,374			20	57	4	31	
	Jieluobu 1 Admin block+1			4,374	27.980783, 90.897718	2	10	2	14	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
	Jieluobu 2 (east 4 new blocks)			4,371	27.980307, 90.898648	6	24	2	4	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
	Jieluobu 3 (north-west)			4,383	27.981397, 90.896362	12	23	0	0	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
	Jieluobu 4 (south)			4,359	27.979993, 90.896433	0	0	0	13	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Gangbatang (village)		Upper Jakarlung	4,383		27.9808599, 90.8924807	62	128	1	4	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Unnamed settlement between Jieluobu and Mbjathang		Upper Jakarlung		4291	27.979319, 90.911476	5	8	0	1	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Majiathang (old; settlement)		Upper Jakarlung		4243	27.977963, 90.922146	8	8	0	5	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Majiatang new (village)		Upper Jakarlung	4,248		27.9752019, 90.9259838	30	64	0		Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Basanglong (administrative village)		Upper Jakarlung	3,827		27.9840282, 90.9788997	6	28	Not yet visible	0	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023

Villages/village clusters and settlements	Subsidiary villages within a cluster	Valley	Altitude: Main villages	Altitude: subsidiary villages & small settlements	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages; estimates)	Housing units within blocks (estimates)	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
Semalong 3 (village)		Upper Jakarlung	3,751		27.986961, 90.989277	15	44	Not yet visible		Planet Lab – Aug 1, 2024
Semalong (village cluster)		Upper Jakarlung	3,698			54	174	2	17	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
	Semalong west			3,698	27.988458, 90.992391	37	119	1	13	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
	Semalong east			3,678	27.989892, 90.995964	17	55	1	4	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Semalong 2 (settlement)		Upper Jakarlung		3589	27.990933, 91.006130	4	14	0	0	Chatham House -Maxar – Dec 2023
Qujielong (village cluster)		Lower Jakarlung	3,488			33	115	2	8	NDTV Maxar Dec 21 2023

Villages/village clusters and settlements	Subsidiary villages within a cluster	Valley	Altitude: Main villages	Altitude: subsidiary villages & small settlements	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages; estintes)	Housing units within blocks (estimates)	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
	Qujielong 1			3,500	27.991290, 91.011243	6	13	0	3	NDTV Maxar Dec 21 2023
	Qujielong 2			3,490	27.989608, 91.011762	8	33	0	1	NDTV Maxar Dec 21 2023
	Qujielong 3			3,488	27.987563, 91.012356	5	24	1	3	NDTV Maxar Dec 21 2023
	Qujielong 4			3,477	27.985972, 91.012782	14	45	1	1	NDTV Maxar Dec 21 2023
Demalong (administrative village; cluster)		Lower Jakarlung	3,361			44	137	0	12	Google Earth
	Block 1 (north)			3,367	27.972753, 91.015969	28	71	0	0	Google Earth

Villages/village clusters and settlements	Subsidiary villages within a cluster	Valley	Altitude: Main villages	Altitude: subsidiary villages & small settlements	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages; estimates)	Housing units within blocks (estimates)	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
	Block 2			3,361	27.971360, 91.016666	7	27	0	9	Google Earth
	Block 3 (south)			3,368	27.970341, 91.018055	9	39	0	3	Google Earth
Demalong 2 (village cluster)		Lower Jakarlung	3,379			52	145	Not yet visible	3	
	Block 1 (north)			3,379	27.969098, 91.015312	39	109	Not yet visible	3	Google Earth
	Block 2 (south)			3,361	27.968678, 91.017224	13	36	Not yet visible	0	Google Earth
Minjuma (administrative village)		Minjuma	4,670		28.0369995, 91.2673644	20	85	2	7	Google Earth

Villages/village clusters and settlements	Subsidiary villages within a cluster	Valley	Altitude: Main villages	Altitude: subsidiary villages & small settlements	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages; estimates)	Housing units within blocks (estimates)	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
Lower Minjuma (village)		Minjuma	4,356		28.0296863, 91.2663519	16	28	Not yet visible	Not yet visible	OpenStreetMap/ Planet Lab
10	15	3			15	369	1,035	12	88	
		Averages:	3,958			32	91.4	1.7	10.4	

## Appendix 4: Number of buildings – Western sector

Villages/Village clusters	Subsidiary villages	Valley	Altitude Main villages	Altitude subsidiary villages	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages/ clusters)	Housing units/ homes	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
Pangda		Kongbumaqu (Amo chu, Mochu, Torsa, Yadonghe)	2,139			34	40	3	5	RapidEditor.org
	Pangda 1			2,139	27.3074830, 89.0074939	28	28	2	2	RapidEditor.org
	Pangda 3			2,117	27.3005946, 89.0085253	6	12	1	3	RapidEditor.org
Pangda 2		Kongbumaqu (Amo chu)	2,190			38	56	1	5	RapidEditor.org
	North			2,190	27.3223087, 89.0062486	18	26	1	2	RapidEditor.org
	South			2,203	27.32129, 89.00653	20	30		3	RapidEditor.org
Langmapu		Middle Langmapu/ Sinchulungpa	3,595			42	186	10	17	RapidEditor.org/ Planet Lab
	Langmapu 1			3,595	27.47806, 89.01340	16	74	4	6	RapidEditor.org/ Planet Lab
	Langmapu 2			3,539	27.47605, 89.00991	11	41	4	6	RapidEditor.org/ Planet Lab
	Langmapu 3			3,495	27.4746, 89.0071	8	46	1	0	RapidEditor.org/ Planet Lab
	Langmapu 4			3,420	27.46783, 88.99933	7	25	1	5	RapidEditor.org
Banggala		Upper Langmapu/ Dramana	4,242		27.4968, 89.0109	52	116	3	16	RapidEditor.org
Chamapu (Sairubu)		Dramana	4,094			47	182	6	22	RapidEditor.org

Villages/Village clusters	Subsidiary villages	Valley	Altitude Main villages	Altitude subsidiary villages	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages/ clusters)	Housing units/ homes	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
	Sairubu 赛如布			4,094	27.5320709, 89.0292587	22	85	3	3	RapidEditor.org
	Jitang 几塘			4,116	27.53239, 89.03393	7	31		1	RapidEditor.org
	Chamatang 查 马淌			4,141	27.5319375, 89.0370897	18	66	3	18	RapidEditor.org
Jiwu (Caitangga)		Yalapu (Shakhatoe)	4,336		27.5670448, 89.0818798	88	330	12	15	RapidEditor.org
Qulei		Shakhatoe (Gieu, Jiwu)	4,286			62	216	10	12	RapidEditor.org
	Jielechi 加勒赤			4,285	27.6055256, 89.1027914	28	101	4	11	RapidEditor.org

Villages/Village clusters	Subsidiary villages	Valley	Altitude Main villages	Altitude subsidiary villages	Coordinates	Residential blocks (red=totals for main villages/ clusters)	Housing units/ homes	Public buildings	Work buildings	Source
	Qulin 曲林 (Qulei/Qule mid-section)			4,286	27.6052116, 89.1043468	19	63	3		RapidEditor.org
	Qulei East			4,305	27.60322, 89.10806	15	52	3	1	RapidEditor.org
Qulei South East			4,385		27.59824, 89.11600	31	113	3	9	RapidEditor.org
8	14				Total:	383	1249	48	101	
		Average per main village/ cluster:	3,708		Average:	47.9	156.1	6	12.6	

# Endnotes

- 1 Research for this paper was carried out by Matthew Akester, Ronald Schwartz, two Tibetan researchers who asked to remain anonymous and the author as part of an ongoing team project to study policy developments in Tibet based on open-source materials.
- 2 The most recent total given till now for China's villages in Bhutanese-claimed territory is 11: "Of the new villages The Times identified in Tibet, one is on land claimed by India, though within China's de facto border; 11 other settlements are in areas contested by Bhutan" (Muyi Xiao and Agnes Chang, "China's Great Wall of Villages," *New York Times*, August 10, 2024, [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/10/world/asia/china-border-villages.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.B04.qD9r.mPFVpXdOHrg0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/10/world/asia/china-border-villages.html?unlocked_article_code=1.B04.qD9r.mPFVpXdOHrg0)).
- 3 Tsering Shakya, "Bhutan can solve its border problem with China – if India lets it," *South China Morning Post*, July 22, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170722024035/http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2103601/bhutan-can-solve-its-border-problem-china-if-india-lets-it>.
- 4 Since all of these villages are in locations that had no previous permanent residents or settlements, many of those locations do not have Bhutanese names. In this report we therefore use the Chinese names given to those villages or to nearby locations by the Chinese authorities, or we use the names given by the Chinese authorities to localities close to the village sites. These are usually sinicised attempts to reproduce Tibetan or Dzongkha names. For valleys, areas and rivers, we use the Bhutanese names where known and add the Chinese names in parentheses.
- 5 For dibian banqian cun (抵边搬迁村, close-to-the-border relocation village), see, for example, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SfMBb5wYy\\_\\_IFXb4g13sXw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SfMBb5wYy__IFXb4g13sXw). For bianjing xiaokang cun (边境小康村, border well-off village), see, for example, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aeGxa76GMtYfC8BBFK6drg>. For dibian xincun (抵边新村, close-to-the-border new village), see, for example, [https://lw.news.cn/2022-09/14/c\\_1310662575.htm](https://lw.news.cn/2022-09/14/c_1310662575.htm).
- 6 "Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity Along the Sino-Bhutanese Border Areas," December 8, 1988. See <http://treaty.mfa.gov.cn/tyfiles/20180718/1531876783307.pdf>.
- 7 Bhutan made a number of protests to China about border incursions, particularly in 2004: "The government had raised the issue [of Chinese road building within Bhutan's traditional borders] several times with the Chinese embassy in New Delhi since August, 2004, and conveyed Bhutan's concern that the road construction was not in keeping with the letter and spirit of Article III of the agreement signed by the two governments in December, 1998" ("Assembly members alarmed by road construction across northern boundary," *Kuensel*, June 8, 2005, pp. 1, 3). Further representations were made in 2009: "This year the Royal Government of Bhutan has protested five times on September 8, September 21, October 5, November 4 and November 27, 2009 and asked the Chinese to stop the work on the basis of 1998 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity in Bhutan-China Border Areas" ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 4th Session of the National Assembly," Section IX, "Report on the Status of Bhutan-China Border Negotiations," December 11, 2009). In 2011, Bhutan made a protest specifically "about the permanent houses being built along the borders," a reference to outposts. The Chinese side replied on October 12 that year that "the permanent houses were built for the border security personnel, so they would be saved the trouble of having to pitch camps and pack them every year" and said that "the Chinese government committed to respect and work in accordance with the agreements drawn between the two nations" (Samten Wangchuk, "2012 Many talks, little progress", *Kuensel* online, date not known). Bhutan protested again in 2017 with regard to Chinese road-construction on the Doklam plateau (see "Press Release Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan," June 29, 2017 <http://www.mfa.gov.bt/press-releases/press-release-272.html>, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20170630023420/http://www.mfa.gov.bt/press-releases/press-release-272.html>).
- 8 This paper does not include a historical account of the Sino-Bhutanese border issue or a detailed study of the military implications of the village construction programme.
- 9 Demalong Phase 1, for example, had 3.4 residents per household (70 households with 238 people). See Fig. 16, below.
- 10 Often written in English as Kula Kangri (Ch.: 库拉岗日峰), but the correct Tibetan or Dzongkha spelling is sku bla mkha' ri or sku lha mkha' ri, not sku lha gangs ri. On this deity, see Charles Ramble, "Mountain God Kula Khari: The Mountain Palace of a Worldly Divinity," *Project Himalayan Art*, Rubin Museum of Art, 2023, <http://rubinmuseum.org/projecthimalayanart/essays/mountain-god-kula-khari>.
- 11 It is generally said that China made the claim to Sakteng "for the first time" in 2020 ("Why Bhutan's Sakteng wildlife sanctuary is disputed by China," *BBC*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-55004196>), but many Chinese maps from the early 20th century showed Sakteng as part of China (see, for example, "毛彪还在1966年屈辱服从英帝麦克马洪圣旨..." [Mao held back from the humiliation...], 007航母, *Blogpost*, September 3, 2023, <https://newmitbs.com/viewtopic.php?t=278601>).
- 12 Note that Chinese sources generally use the word Chamapu (查马普 or 查马浦) or Chamanong (查马弄) for the Dramana river or valley, which is sometimes also called Delamana 德拉玛纳. They use the word Jiwu 基伍 for Shakhatoe (referred to as Gieu, Jiu or Gi'u in Dzongkha). The Chinese term Zhuomoma refers not to the Dramana, as shown on the map, but to the river known as the Dromomaqu, Kangbumaqui, or Yadongqu in Chinese, and as the Amo chu or Torsa chu in Dzongkha.
- 13 Bhutan has a long-standing policy of not having formal relations with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. However, it has indicated several times since the early 2000s that it expects to open relations with China (see Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy, "The Changing Contours of Bhutan's Foreign Policy and the Implications for China and India", *Observer Research Foundation, Occasional Papers*, July 21, 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-changing-contours-of-bhutan-s-foreign-policy-and-the-implications-for-china-and-india>). In 2023, the then Prime Minister of Bhutan said "Theoretically, how can Bhutan not have any bilateral relations with China? The question is when, and in what manner" (Bhutan-China border demarcation talks inching towards completion: Bhutan PM Tshering," *The Hindu*, October 8, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bhutan-china-border-demarcation-talks-inching-towards-completion-bhutan-pm-tshering/article67392769.ece>).
- 14 Although most foreign commentators claim that China proposed the package deal to Bhutan in 1996, in fact China made the proposal in 1990 ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 75th Session of the National Assembly held from 20th June to 16th July 1997," Section III, "Bhutan-China Boundary Talks", July 1997, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/75%20session.pdf>). See also Manoj Joshi, "Doklam: To start at the very beginning", *Observer Research Foundation, Special Report*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/doklam-start-very-beginning>.
- 15 Adapted from <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中不邊界問題> and Menghuihu (梦回糊涂, Dreams Back to Confusion), "[中不边界争端详述] (2021版原创)" ([Details of the China-Bhutan border dispute] (2021 original version)), *Blogpost*, November 22, 2021, <https://zhuannan.zhihu.com/p/436127559>. Numbers are approximate.
- 16 Manoj Joshi notes, "there are indications that in the 10th round of talks, the Bhutanese were ready to strike a deal with the Chinese and indeed agree to the swap. This can be gleaned from the king's statement to the 73rd session of the National Assembly in August-September 1995" (Manoj Joshi, "Doklam: To start at the very beginning", *Observer Research Foundation, Special Report*, August 9 2017, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/doklam-start-very-beginning>). At that session, the king told the assembly, "The talks have made steady progress thus far, and there are now only the above four areas that need to be negotiated.... His Majesty expressed his confidence that the northern boundary will be successfully demarcated through the process of friendly dialogue" ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 73rd Session of the National Assembly held from 10th August to 2nd September, 1995," Section III, "Bhutan-China Boundary Talks", September 1995, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/73%20session.pdf>). See also "Bhutan in principle accepted the proposals" ("Bhutan-China Relation", October 25, 2002, [https://web.archive.org/web/20021024231629/http://www.bhutannewsonline.com/bhutan\\_china.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20021024231629/http://www.bhutannewsonline.com/bhutan_china.html)).
- 17 In 2001, the King informed the Assembly that "during the 14th round of border talks held in China [in 2000] the Bhutanese delegation had further extended the claim line in three areas in Doklam, Sinchulumba and Dramana. From Doklam the claim line has been extended to include the areas along Sinchulumba to Pangkala [Ch.: Banggala] and from Dramana to Giu [Shakhatoe] Chhu" ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 79th Session of the National Assembly," Section X, "Border Talks", 2001, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/79%20session.pdf>).
- 18 Tenzing Lamsang, "Giving Bhutan its due", *Indian Express*, August 31, 2017, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20170830192327/http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/giving-bhutan-its-due-doklam-standoff-india-china-relation-4821334/>.
- 19 The India-Bhutan Treaty says "neither Government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other" (The Indian-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, February 8, 2007, Article 2, <https://www.mea.gov.in/images/pdf/india-bhutan-treaty-07.pdf>). Joshi (op. cit., supra) notes correctly that members of the Bhutanese parliament also objected to the terms offered by China. Two members said "the Chinese proposal to exchange the lands in the western sector with those in the central sector in Bumthang was untenable as both the areas had always belonged to the Bhutanese" and "since the disputed lands were actually Bhutanese territory, the question of exchanging them as proposed by the Chinese delegation did not arise," while the Deputy Minister of Agriculture stated that "the Chinese had made a proposal to exchange lands which were in fact Bhutanese territory and therefore obviously not acceptable to Bhutan. ... They all stated that the Bhutan-China boundary should be resolved and demarcated on the basis of the traditionally recognized borders that have existed since time immemorial." See "Proceedings and Resolutions of the 75th Session of the National Assembly held from 20th June to 16th July 1997," Section III, "Bhutan-China Boundary Talks", July 1997, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/75%20session.pdf>.
- 20 See, for example, Krista E. Wiegand, "Territorial Disputes as Bargaining Leverage." In *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, and Settlement*, 41–68. University of Georgia Press, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/61.61.61.61>, and Tami Davis Biddle, "Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners," *The Strategist*, Vol 3, Iss 2, Spring 2020: 94–109, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/8864>.
- 21 See, for example, Jack Lau, "Chinese village construction in disputed zone outpaces China-Bhutan border talks," *South China Morning Post*, February 18, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3251394/chinese-village-construction-disputed-zone-outpaces-china-bhutan-border-talks>.

22 See “西藏出台规划确保边境地区如期全面建成小康” (Tibet releases plan to ensure border areas become moderately prosperous as scheduled), 中国民族报 (China Nationalities Newspaper), December 4, 2017,

[http://www.tibetol.cn/html/2017/xizangyaowen\\_1204/35683.html](http://www.tibetol.cn/html/2017/xizangyaowen_1204/35683.html) and “西藏620多个边境小康村全部建成” (More than 620 well-off villages on the border in Tibet have all been completed), 人民日报 (People's Daily) July 4, 2022, [http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/Village\\_ruled\\_by\\_law/content/2022-07/04/content\\_8746878.htm](http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/Village_ruled_by_law/content/2022-07/04/content_8746878.htm). See also Muiy Xiao and Agnes Chang, “China's Great Wall of Villages,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2024, [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/10/world/asia/china-border-villages.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.B04.qD9r.mPFVpXdOHrg](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/10/world/asia/china-border-villages.html?unlocked_article_code=1.B04.qD9r.mPFVpXdOHrg).

23 Chinese media reports say that 628 new “moderately well-off” border villages were completed according to the 2017 plan, but the reports do not say that they were built as part of that plan. This is probably because the majority already existed (including, most probably, the 201 that were designated in the plan as “second-line villages”, i.e., located further from the border) but were rebranded or upgraded in order to fulfil the quota of 628 new border villages.

24 Tudeng Kezhu (Thubten Khedrup), Jiakuai tuijin Xizang bianjing xiaokang cun jianshe 加快推进西藏边境小康村建设 (Accelerate the construction of well-off villages on the Tibetan border), Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, September 24, 2020, <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2020/09/24/ART11600907994469243.shtml>.

25 In Tibet, the first stage of border work, from 2010 to 2015, is said to have focused on “attaching great importance to strengthening border work from a strategic perspective to build a safe and stable Great Wall of Steel”. This was done at that stage by improving social and economic development in border areas. The second stage, from 2015-2020, focused on Xi Jinping's “important strategic thinking on border governance and stability in Tibet” and on “combining the promotion of poverty alleviation and prosperity of border residents with the protection and consolidation of borders”. The third stage, from 2020, focused on “strengthening border defence”. See Xie Weimin and Wang Dong, “我国西藏边境地区民生的新发展及其启示” (The new development of people's livelihood in China's Tibet's border area and its enlightenment), *中国藏学* (Chinese Tibetan Studies), August 2, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QUDNTqkIB3j3oH1-dhW1ng>.

26 Relocation of rural residents to peri-urban areas or locations with direct access to urban areas is the principal development strategy in Tibet, as in much of China (see for example, “Educate the Masses to Change Their Minds: China's Forced Relocation of Rural Tibetans,” *Human Rights Watch*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/05/22/educate-masses-change-their-minds/chinas-forced-relocation-rural-tibetans>).

27 “Professional border residents are: a group of people who make their income by living in border areas [and who] will definitely protect every inch of our motherland and be qualified border guards” (“什么是职业边民?” [What are professional border residents?], 要有光哦 [Let there be light] [Weixin channel [Ngari prefecture, TAR], July 6, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6qo7r9BUrs4bOwpSGX4WA>). The pilot programme for the “Professional border residents” scheme began in Tsamda (Ch.: Zanda) county in Ngari in March 2023. It has also been implemented in Lhokha municipality “to expand the team of border guards, improve the border prevention and control system, and accelerate the in-depth development of military-civilian integration” (“藏南建村庄国道 抵近印控区「反蚕食」” [Construction of national highway to villages in southern Tibet to counter “encroachment” in Indian-controlled areas] 明报新闻网 [Mingpao News Network], April 21, 2024, [www.mingshengbao.com/tor/article.php?aid=913973](http://www.mingshengbao.com/tor/article.php?aid=913973)).

28 “His Majesty informed the Assembly members that the Royal Bhutan Army had seasonal outposts in the areas where the roads were constructed. There was an outpost with one officer and 15 men at Shakatoy, an outpost with one officer and 10 men near Pangka La [Ch.: Banggala], an outpost with one officer and 10 men at Lharigang, and an outpost with one officer and 10 men at Phutegang [Ch.: Duosilinma/Puzhenla].... His Majesty pointed out that the outposts in all these areas had not been recently established but had been there for more than 40 years” (“Assembly members alarmed by road construction across northern boundary,” *Kuensel*, June 8, 2005, pp. 1, 3).

29 Xie Yiguan, “高原上的三代守边人: 守护祖国边境线是毕生使命” (Three generations of border guards on the plateau: guarding the motherland's border is a life-long mission), *Xizang ribao* (Tibet Daily), August 5, 2019, [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190805\\_6654390.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190805_6654390.html). The article is about a Tibetan resident of a border village in Ngari, western Tibet, where the border is with India.

30 The border patrol at Changguo, a township in Saga county bordering Mustang in Nepal, had reportedly caught 56 people illegally crossing or trying to cross the border (“illegal entry and exit personnel”) by 2021. The timespan is not clear, but given that the patrol was established in 2003, this suggests an average of 3 people a year. See “快来看看! 昌果乡边境派出所摩托车巡逻队的‘幸福在哪里’” (Come and have a look! “Where is the happiness” of the motorcycle patrol of Changguo Township Border Police Station), 萨嘎县 (Saga County) Weixin channel, March 11, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/W8rol5qvLuMOzB1b5WXiw>.

31 The exile administration in northern India gave these figures for the number of Tibetans escaping from Tibet or seeking asylum since 2009: 1,248; 2011: 753; 2012: 375; 2013: 156; 2014: 88; 2015: 88; 2016: 129; 2017: 52; 2018: 43. 19 escaped in 2019, 5 in 2020, 10 in 2021, and 5 in 2022 (“Generation Change: 10 Years of Xi Jinping's Sinification and Securitization of Tibetans,” *International Campaign for Tibet*, August 8, 2023, <https://savetibet.org/generation-change/>). All these Tibetans would have crossed the Tibetan-Nepal border.

32 Zhou Ping, “陆疆治理: 从“族际主义”转向“区域主义” (Land border governance: From “inter-ethnicism” to “regionalism”), *国家行政学院学报* (Journal of the National Academy of Administration), reposted on *cpnews.cn*, January 15, 2016, <http://>

[theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0115/c217905-28059110.html](http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0115/c217905-28059110.html). For perhaps the earliest call for relocating people to border villages, see Sun Chunri, “中朝边境地区人口流失及对策——以延边朝鲜族自治州为例” (Population loss and countermeasures in the border areas between China and North Korea: Taking Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture as an example), *期北方民族大学学报(哲学社会科学版)* (Journal of Beifang University for Nationalities, Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition) Vol. 3, No. 93, May 2010, <http://www.cqvip.com/qk/82413a/201003/36087395.html>.

33 Yang Minghong and Wang Zhoubo, “我国陆地边境地区“空心化”的类型、成因与治理” (Types, causes and treatment of “hollowing” in our country's land border regions), *四川师范大学学报(社会科学版)* (Journal of Sichuan Normal University, Social Science Edition), Volume 47, Issue 6, November 6, 2020, <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?doi=10.13734/j.cnki.1000-5315.2020.06.002>.

34 China's first border incursions into Bhutan, including the pivotal decision to send Tibetan herders to overwinter in the Beyul in 1995, happened before Bhutan showed any reluctance to accept China's package deal. The early stages of sovereignty assertion were thus forms of pressure placed on Bhutan even when it appeared a willing partner in negotiations.

35 The Bhutanese government has stated that Chinese cross-border incursions followed what the Chinese side saw as set-backs in negotiations. For example, “After the Royal Government once again put forward 1989 claim line during the 14th Round held in 2000, the Bhutan-China Boundary Talks could not make much progress, due to which in 2004 the Chinese started road construction in the border areas” (“Proceedings and Resolutions of the 4th Session of the National Assembly,” Section IX, “Report on the Status of Bhutan-China Border Negotiations”, December 11, 2009).

36 Chinese media articles describe the use of their herders as a forward strategy to repel Bhutanese herders and border guards: “In the decades before 1995, the invasion of grasslands in the Baiyu area [by the Bhutanese] was almost crazy. Not only did the other party send people to seize the grasslands for grazing, but they also often sent soldiers to patrol here, seriously interfering with the normal production and life of the border residents in the Baiyu area. ... To carry out border guarding and consolidation between valleys and cliffs where few people have been, the first task is to drive away livestock that do not belong to Chinese herdsmen, and send people to guard and patrol regularly at key nodes. In the following two months, Gusang Tenzin frequently went in and out of Baiyu area, led the people to cross mountains and rivers, walked 45 kilometres of rugged pastoral roads, drove Bhutanese herders and more than 400 yaks to the Cogala Mountain area outside Basang Hot Spring, and promptly arranged for the herders of Lajiao Township to graze yaks in the Baiyu area.” Ji Chunhong and Zhao Yuhao, “光明网“守边不忘富民 中不边境线上的忠诚卫士” (Guarding the border without forgetting to enrich the people, loyal guards on the China-Bhutan border), *光明网* (Guangming.com), August 28, 2019, [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190828\\_6672484.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190828_6672484.html).

37 “The Chinese herders did not allow them to graze their yaks beyond Jiu-Chhu [Shakhatoy river]. The Chinese herders were demanding grazing fees from the Bhutanese despite being told that Bhutanese herders had been grazing their yaks in Jiu for generations and there was, therefore, no question of paying any fees” (“Proceedings and Resolutions of the 73rd Session of the National Assembly held from 10th August to 2nd September, 1995,” Section III, “Bhutan-China Boundary Talks”, September 1995, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/73%20session.pdf>). “The Secretary [for International Boundaries] reminded the members that regarding demands for some form of tax in money or kind from our herders, such demands had come up many times before. On this, His Majesty had issued strict commands, which we had conveyed to our herders during our visits to the border. Our herders were instructed that they must not pay any tax for grass or water and they should continue to graze their livestock as before.” “Proceedings of the 82nd National Assembly,” Pt. VI, “Border Talks”, June 2004, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/82%20session.pdf>.

38 “The Bhutanese delegation informed their Chinese counterparts that Tibetan herdsmen had been intruding into Majathang and Jakarlung, in the central sector of the boundary, and had even constructed sheds” (“Proceedings and Resolutions of the 75th Session of the National Assembly held from 20th June to 16th July 1997,” Section III, Bhutan-China Boundary Talks, July 1997, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/75%20session.pdf>).

39 “The Bumthang chimi [representative] reminded the National Assembly that ...in 1999, about 62 Tibetans led by a few Chinese officials had made a three-metre-wide mule track inside Bhutanese territory right up to the Pasamlum [sic] hot springs. Timber and stones had also been collected by the Tibetans for the construction of houses in the same area” (“Proceedings and Resolutions of the 80th National Assembly,” 2002).

40 While duty points were set up in areas before roads were constructed to those locations (such as at Demalong and the Ngarab la), outposts were generally built after roads had been completed (such as at Semujong in 2012, Puzhenla in 2012, and Banggala in 2019). Because duty points are not visible on satellite imagery, we have not been able to give dates for their initial construction. For other images of duty points, see note 130 below.

41 “On August 21, 2004, the government had observed that a motor road was being constructed [by China] from Jella towards RBA post at Shakhatoy (Giu) and beyond it towards Lepola, on the Bhutanese side of the traditional boundary claim line. ... On August 27, 2004, the Chinese started constructing a motor road from Wuchumakhang [military base] towards Pangka La [Ch.: Banggala] Chorten.... On the same day they had started constructing a motor road from Langmarpo Chhu to Asam Jagphu and the road continued from Asam Jagphu towards Charithang Chhu.... In October, 2004, the Chinese started constructing a motor road from Langmarpo Chhu towards Phutegang [Ch.: Puzhenla] ridge, overlooking Charithang valley” (“Assembly members alarmed by road construction across northern boundary,” *Kuensel*, June 8, 2005, pp. 1, 3).

42 "Guide the non-border population and retired military personnel to move and settle on the front line of the border." See "西藏居民收入要涨!" (The income of Tibetan residents will rise!), 西藏自治区人民政府办公厅关于 (General office of the TAR People's Government), 山南融媒 (Shannan Media) Weixin channel, September 12, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/v5JBAW4ECrK2gdYYWY0yw>.

43 The government was not always receptive to these reports. In 2004, two representatives reported to the Assembly that Tibetans had seized the pastureland of Tshethangkha and other areas in Haa dzongkhag. They were told by the Secretary for International Boundaries that "the question of losing our pastures to Tibetan herder[s] did not arise... the submissions were baseless." The representatives were then publicly ordered "to avoid submitting false and unconfirmed reports to the House" ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 82nd Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan," Section VI, "Border Talks", 2004, pp. 77ff, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/82%20session.pdf>). The local representatives turned out to be correct: by 2012, and probably much earlier, the Chinese had established a military outpost at Semujong, just next to Tshethangkha. The former pastureland of Tshethangkha, now marked on Chinese maps as Caitangga, is now the site of the largest of all CBVs so far built by China.

44 See Menghuihu (梦回糊涂, Dreams Back to Confusion), "[中不边界争端详述] (2021版原创)" ([Details of the China-Bhutan border dispute] (2021 original version)), Blogpost, November 22, 2021, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/436127559>.

45 From an international legal perspective, effective administrative presence and control can be considered a valid basis for a sovereignty claim only if it is not classified as foreign occupation (see "Topic: Border Dispute Between China And Bhutan," USINDOPACOM J06/SJA TACAID SERIES, March 11 2024, [https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC-BHUTAN%20BORDER%20DISPUTE%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC-BHUTAN%20BORDER%20DISPUTE%20(FINAL).pdf)).

46 Chinese scholars sometimes take a negative view of India's use of "actual control" to justify its sovereignty over territory that China claims, describing the Indian approach as "domesticization, administrativeization, populationization, and militarization". See, for example, "India's insistence on 'acknowledging the status quo' as a solution" and "trying to create a 'fait accompli'" is evidence of "a bad mentality" (Deng Hongying, "A review of domestic research on the Sino-Indian border dispute," Ancient Books, July 13, 2017, <https://m.sohu.com/n/501053369/>).

47 See "统计用区划代码和城乡划分代码" (Statistical regional codes and urban-rural division codes), National Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/tjzb/qhdm/>.

48 A central or public building is not yet visible at Basanglong new village, where building work has hardly begun, or at Majiatang new village, possibly because it too is not yet completed.

49 The eight clusters in the north-east are Jieluobu, Semalong, Qujielong and Demalong. In the west, Pangda is composed of two adjoining villages on the banks of the Amo chu (Pangda 1 and Pangda 3, which is sometimes called Pangda South); Langmapu consists of four subsidiary villages in a row along the Langmapu river; Sairubu (Lerigang), on the banks of the Dramana, consists of three subsidiary villages; and Qulei includes three villages at the headwaters of the Shakatoo, with another village 600m to the south-east. Demalong 2 and Caitangga (Jiwu) have at least two sections, but in these cases we have assumed that there is no administrative distinction between their sections.

50 For the administration building at Langmapu, see, for example, "[珠峰新时代文明实践·亚东篇]边境村开展铲雪扫雪文明实践志愿服务" ([Civilized Practice in the New Era of the Mount Everest -Yadong Chapter] Border villages carry out volunteer service activities for snow shovelling and civilized practice), 亚东县权威发布 (Yadong County Authoritative Release) Weixin channel, February 2, 2024, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zKYQU\\_On8Uf2k29SKumaw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zKYQU_On8Uf2k29SKumaw).

51 That the soldiers stationed in Jieluobu and Demalong are not Tibetans is visible from photographs and indicated by articles describing a medical team treating the soldiers collectively for altitude-related conditions and prescribing oxygen therapy for them. See notes 82, 86. The Party Secretary of Demalong was a non-Tibetan called Li in January 2024, according to "喜马拉雅游记【沟谷定旅】第十集：拉郊峡谷（下）故土新归" (Himalaya Travel Notes [Valley Trip] Episode 10: Lajiao Gorge (Part 2) Hometown New Return), 荒野侣行 Wilderness Couple -Travel, January 8, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0kQviRcpUA>.

52 See Xie Weimin and Wang Dong, "我国西藏边境地区民生的新发展及其启示" (The new development of people's livelihood in China's Tibet's border area and its enlightenment), 中国藏学 (Chinese Tibetan Studies), August 2, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QUdNTqkFB3j3oH1-dhW1ng>.

53 Sources: "关于开展评估山南市洛扎县德玛隆DB搬迁安置点建设项目可行性研究报告方案比选的通知"

(Notice on the Evaluation of the Feasibility Study Report of the Demalong DB Relocation Site Construction Project in Luozha County, Shannan Municipality), Shannan Municipal Development and Reform Commission, February 16, 2023, [http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202302/t20230216\\_115577.html](http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202302/t20230216_115577.html); "关于开展评估山南市洛扎县曲杰龙DB搬迁安置点建设项目可研及初步设计概算-方案比选的通知," March 3, 2023, [http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202303/t20230303\\_116159.html](http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202303/t20230303_116159.html); "关于开展评估山南市洛扎县曲杰龙（色玛龙）DB搬迁安置点建设项目可研及初步设计概算方案比选的通知," March 3, 2023, [http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202303/t20230303\\_116160.html](http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202303/t20230303_116160.html); "关于开展评估山南市洛扎县拉郊乡杰罗布DB搬迁安置点（扩容）建设项目可行性研究报告方案比选的通知," February 16, 2023, [http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202302/t20230216\\_115579.html](http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202302/t20230216_115579.html).

54 "道路已修复，居民生活更幸福" (The road has been repaired, and the lives of border residents have become happier), 西藏日报 (Tibet Daily), January 18, 2018, [https://m.sohu.com/a/218983803\\_160909/](https://m.sohu.com/a/218983803_160909/).

55 "一句承诺就是一生的坚守——山南市洛扎县拉郊乡党委书记古桑旦增守边富民记," (A promise is a lifelong commitment – Gusang Danzeng, Secretary of the Party Committee of Lajiao Township, Luozha County, Shannan Municipality, guards the border and enriches the people), 西藏日报 (Tibet Daily), June 3, 2017, [https://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw\\_702/zh\\_711/201706/t20170603\\_553088.html](https://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw_702/zh_711/201706/t20170603_553088.html), archived at [https://web.archive.org/web/20210409094139/http://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw\\_702/zh\\_711/201706/t20170603\\_553088.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20210409094139/http://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw_702/zh_711/201706/t20170603_553088.html).

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63 "堆纳乡开展走访慰问 问边境村搬迁群众活动", (Theme Education I Duina Township visits and comforts the relocated people in border villages), 亚东县权威发布 (Yadong County Authoritative Release) Weixin channel, January 3, 2024, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fYpJ2YCF8fKXAsVdC623DA>.

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72 "主题教育 | 市文化局“优秀人才基层行”——行政村文艺演出队帮扶活动在朗玛普边境小康村开展" (Theme Education: The Municipal Cultural Bureau's "Excellent Talents Tour at the Grassroots Level" – The Administrative Village Art Performance Team Assistance Activity was launched in the Langmapu Well-off Border Village), 亚东县权威发布 (Yadong County Authoritative Release) Weixin channel, November 22, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7hJf3pGbnGKofL5R1EGmQ>.

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74 Although some websites (such as Baidu) list these villages as administrative villages, the listing by the National Bureau of Statistics (<https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/tjz/tjyqdmhcxhfdm/2023/54/05/27/540527205.html>) describes each of them as a "residents' committee" (juweihui). A juweihui is the equivalent of a "villagers' committee" (cunminweiyuanhui) in a rural area, and indicates that these villages are equivalent to an administrative village, since natural villages do not have villagers' committees.

75 Pangda is listed as an administrative village on various unofficial or semi-official websites and maps in China, such as <https://baike.baidu.com/item/庞达村/55175982>, but is not included in the National Bureau of Statistics list of villages at the level of administrative village for the relevant township (Xiayadong) for 2021, 2022, or 2023. See <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/tjz/tjyqdmhcxhfdm/2023/54/02/33/540233100.html>. This may be because its location is sensitive.

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77 The initial notice issued by the prefectural-level government regarding construction work at Qujielong was published on March 3, 2023. It referred to Qujielong as "the Qujielong DB relocation and resettlement site" (DB banqian anzhi dian), where DB presumably stands for dibian or "close to the border". See "关于开展评估山南市洛扎县曲杰龙DB搬迁安置点建设项目可研及初步设计概算 方案比选的通知" (Notice on the evaluation of the feasibility study and preliminary design and budget estimate and comparison for the construction project of the Qujielong DB relocation and resettlement site in Luozha County, Shannan City, China), Shannan [Lhokha] Development and Reform Committee, March 3, 2023, [http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202303/t20230303\\_116159.html](http://fgw.shannan.gov.cn/xwzx/fgdt/202303/t20230303_116159.html).

78 The terms dibian banqian dian (抵边搬迁点, close-to-the-border relocation site or banqian dian (relocation site) seem to be used primarily for a border settlement or site before it is fully settled or formally constituted as a village. See, for example, "戍边安民, 走进日土县阿汝村甲岗抵边搬迁点91户村民的幸福生活" (Guarding the border and ensuring the safety of the people, a look at the happy lives of 91 households in the Jiagang border relocation site of Aru Village, Rutog County), 网信日土 (Netcom Daily) Weixin channel, March 22, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/c0VpAlw1tu76vZ-LXB-Swqw> and "奋进新征程 建功新时代"·速览洛扎" (Strive forward on a new journey and build a new era of meritorious service)·A quick look at Luozha), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, April 11, 2023, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fj21vHKEf2yHxy2\\_uM1Ng](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fj21vHKEf2yHxy2_uM1Ng).

79 See "市总工会联合亚东县总工会开展“守边有你 温暖有我”主题五送活动" (The Municipal Federation of Trade Unions and the Yadong County Federation of Trade Unions jointly launched the "Guarding the Border with You and Warming Me" themed Five-sends activity), 日喀则工会 (Shigatse Trade Union) Weixin channel, May 26, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/0GixyTuM2DsWVVRJk8wZEg>.

80 For examples of dibian banqian cun (抵边搬迁村), bianjiang xiaokang cun (边境小康村) or dibian xincun (抵边新村), see note 5 above.

81 "Guo Zhenli, 50, is from Xining, Qinghai. In 2008, he married a Tibetan girl named Bianba Zhuoma in Shengge Township, which is adjacent to Lajiao Township, and settled down in Shengge Township. In 2021, Guo Zhenli's family took the initiative to apply to move to Jiuluobu Village, Lajiao Township. 'Now the country's border policy is good, and we are ready to graze and guard the border for a long time,' he said." See "行走洛扎秘境: 看! 喜马拉雅深处的巨变" (Walking in the secret land of Luozha: Look! Great changes in the depths of the Himalayas), Xinhuanet, February 15, 2022, [http://www.news.cn/politics/2022-02/15/c\\_1128376098.htm](http://www.news.cn/politics/2022-02/15/c_1128376098.htm).

82 See, for example, "尼玛县总工会向高海拔乡镇发放“高原职工氧吧”制氧机 (Nyoma County Federation of Trade Unions distributes "Plateau Workers Oxygen Bar" oxygen concentrators to high-altitude towns), 网信尼玛 (Netcom Nima), April 25, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/v-KQ-SIWHIDNuTRgVa9gJQ>.

83 A comment below the self-driving tourist video of a visit to Demalong says "Han people from Yunnan and Sichuan should be moved there to guard the border" (January 10, 2024, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hT/>; see note 62 above).

84 The claim is roughly supported by available satellite imagery. Copernicus (Sentinel Hub) shows that random images of parts of the Beyul showed cloud cover of 75% or more in 2022 on 55 out of 73 days at times when images were taken (25%), and on 50 out of 70 days in 2023 (29%).

85 "Our comrades on the plateau must pay attention to protecting their hearts..." Dr. Tian Miao from the Department of Internal Medicine saw that the soldiers were troubled by heart problems, and provided psychological counselling to the soldiers who came for consultation. At the same time, he emphasized that prevention of plateau heart disease is the focus ... He also popularized scientific living, oxygen therapy, mental health and other plateau disease prevention knowledge, reducing the psychological pressure on the soldiers." See "跨越喜马拉雅的执着, 援藏医疗队把流动诊室开到了雪域边关" (With perseverance across the Himalayas, the Tibet Aid Medical Team opened a mobile clinic at the snowy border), 白求恩国际和平医院 (Bethune International Peace Hospital) Weixin channel, June 20 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/0JN-Xh-jFVz4WBHbwjSx7wA>.

86 "Our comrades on the plateau must pay attention to protecting their hearts..." Dr. Tian Miao from the Department of Internal Medicine saw that the soldiers were troubled by heart problems, and provided psychological counselling to the soldiers who came for consultation. At the same time, he emphasized that prevention of plateau heart disease is the focus ... He also popularized scientific living, oxygen therapy, mental health and other plateau disease prevention knowledge, reducing the psychological pressure on the soldiers." See "跨越喜马拉雅的执着, 援藏医疗队把流动诊室开到了雪域边关" (With perseverance across the Himalayas, the Tibet Aid Medical Team opened a mobile clinic at the snowy border), 白求恩国际和平医院 (Bethune International Peace Hospital) Weixin channel, June 20 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/0JN-Xh-jFVz4WBHbwjSx7wA>.

87 See "Bhutan denies Chinese village in its territory - TV reports of settlement at Doklam", The Hindu, November 20, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bhutan-denies-chinese-village-in-its-territory/article33144172.ece>.

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89 Vishnu Som, "China Sets Up Village Within Bhutan, 9 Km From Doklam Face-Off Site", NDTV, November 20, 2020, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/china-sets-up-village-within-bhutan-9-km-from-doklam-face-off-site-2327563>; Robert Barnett, with Matthew Akester, Ronald Schwartz and two unnamed others, "China Is Building Entire Villages in Another Country's Territory", Foreign Policy, May 7, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/07/china-bhutan-border-villages-security-forces/> and "China Is Using Tibetans as Agents of Empire in the Himalayas", Foreign Policy, July 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/28/china-tibet-bhutan-empire-borders-villages/>; Devjyot Ghoshal, Anand Katakam and Aditi Bhandari, "China steps up construction along disputed Bhutan border," Reuters, January 12, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/CHINA-BHUTAN/BORDER/zjvqknaryvx/>; John Pollock and Damien Symon, "China takes more land in Bhutan before expected border deal", December 1, 2023, updated December 20, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-to-day/2023-12/china-takes-more-land-bhutan-expected-border-deal/>; Vishu Som, "China's Biggest Land Grab Carves Into Ancestral Areas Of Bhutan's Royal Family," NDTV, January 6, 2024, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/chinas-biggest-land-grab-carves-into-ancestral-areas-of-bhutans-royal-family-4811168>.

90 Social media accounts that have provided key information on CBVs and other border issues have included @Detresfa\_ (Damien Symon, Intel Lab), @NatureDesai (Nature Desai), @Kautilya33 (Kautilya 3), @Kyangs\_Thang (Kyang Thang རྒྱུ་འཕེལ་), and @Peter16813 (Peter168), all on Twitter or "X".

91 See "行摄北北-自驾游第三季 (16) 拉康镇-拉郊乡-德玛隆村 解锁德玛隆冷母拉松垭口 填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南" (Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmulla Pass ...), 行摄北北 (Travelling to North) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hT/>.

92 Recent research has found that among local residents the term Beyul Khenpa-jong is used only for the southernmost part of the area popularly known as the Beyul, although we have used the term here to include all three valleys in that area (the Pagsamlung, Upper Jakarlung and Lower Jakarlung). Khenpa-jong itself is on an east-facing mountain slope in the far south of this area, on the east bank of the Lower Pagsamlung, c. 11.5km upstream of the confluence with the Kuru chu near Dungkar.

93 The Tibetan and Dzongkha word lung means a valley. The word chu, often spelt as chhu in Bhutan, means water or river.

94 For the anglicised versions of the Dzongkha names Kur chu (Upper Jakarlung), Ura la (Ngarab la) and Yangrilung chu (Pagsamlung), see Soil Atlas of Bhutan, National Soil Services Centre, Simtokha, Thimphu, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Bhutan, 2024, p.40.

95 "The approved boundary line ... runs from Moenlakarchung to Dompala and to Choegungla through Yangjula and to Newla uptill Tshozam." The Choegungla (Choekong la) is the north-western pass that forms a double pass to the north of the Beyul together with the Namgung la. Statement of the Secretary for International Boundaries, Dasho Pema Wangchuk, "Proceedings of the 82nd National Assembly," Pt. VI, "Border Talks", June 2004, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/82%20session.pdf>. Bhutanese documents refer at times to the Choekong la as the Choegungla or the Choigong la, and to the Yanjug la as the Yangjula. Tibetans refer to the Yangjug la as the gYag rgyugs la.

96 See Bod rang skyong ljongs srid 'dzin sa khul gyi sa bkra (Tibet Autonomous Region Administrative Area Map), TAR Survey and Mapping Bureau, Lhasa, September 1981 (reproduced by Tibet Information Network, London, 1994).

97 The exact location of the Pagsamlung hot springs (tsa chu in Dzongkha, chu tshan in Tibetan, and quzhen in Chinese) is unclear, as there are at least two possible hot springs in the valley. One is overlooking the outpost at Lhalung Lhakhang (Ch.: Lalonglagang 拉龙拉康), close to the location referred to in Chinese texts as Basangti/ci. The other location, found on some unofficial reports and maps, for the hot springs at Pagsamlung, is at a site named Basangquzhen in Chinese, 6kms upstream of Lhalung Lhakhang on the Pagsamlung, near the former Bhutanese military outpost at Tangwo.

98 See Ji Chunhong and Zhao Yuhao, "光明网 "守边不忘富民 中不边境线上的忠诚卫士" (Guarding the border without forgetting to enrich the people, loyal guards on the China-Bhutan border), 光明网 (Guangming.com), August 28, 2019, [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190828\\_6672484.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190828_6672484.html).

99 Gusang Danzeng, "[跟着总书记看西藏]边境有我们, 请祖国放心!" ([Follow the General Secretary to visit Tibet] Please rest assured, motherland, we are here at the border!), 中国西藏网 (China Tibet Net), October 15, 2022, [http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-10/15/content\\_42139043.htm](http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-10/15/content_42139043.htm).

100 This claim line is reproduced on maps by Menghuihutu (@1002什么; see Fig. 17) and on OpenStreetMap (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/12931401>).

101 We have not been able to find any references in official Chinese media reports (as opposed to blogposts by private individuals) to the Pagsamlung valley by name, whether as Basangnong (巴桑弄) or Basanglong (巴桑隆 or 巴桑龙). Note also that we have not found references to visits by officials to places within the valley, such as Cuogala (the Tshokha la) and Basangquzhen, in official media reports since November 2019. Note also that it is clear that Chinese tourists are not permitted by the Chinese authorities to cross into the Pagsamlung valley.

102 See "自然资源部关于印发《公开地图内容表示规范》的通知" (Circular of the Ministry of Natural Resources on the Issuance of the Specifications for the Representation of the Contents of Public Maps), 自然资源部 (Ministry of Natural Resources), February 6, 2023, in State Council Gazette, 2023 (11), [https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2023/content\\_5752310.htm](https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2023/content_5752310.htm).

103 "Proceedings and Resolutions of the 82nd Session of the National Assembly," Section VI, "Border Talks", 2004, pp. 84–5.

104 See "赵天武深入边境一线调研指导 边境管控工作并宣传十九届四中全会精神" (Zhao Tianwu went deep into the frontline to investigate and guide border control work and publicize the spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, November 28, 2019, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1HBOd7U9\\_l3rmkhvjXk9Q](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1HBOd7U9_l3rmkhvjXk9Q). Unofficial Chinese commentaries say that China's southernmost claim point in the Pagsamlung is 4.5kms further down the valley at Tashi Namdzong (Ch.: Zhaxiangmuzong 扎西朗木宗), roughly on the same east-west line.

105 See "中国官方悄然更新县域地图 藏南最新边界曝光" (Chinese Officials Quietly Update County Maps, South Tibet's Newest Boundaries Revealed), Dawanews, April 18, 2020, <http://www.dawanews.com/dawa/node3/n5/n17/u1a130634.html> and "Arunachal in latest Chinese maps as border region of 'South Tibet'", DW (Duowei) News, April 25, 2020, <https://theeasternlink.com/aranachal-in-latest-chinese-maps-as-border-region-of-south-tibet/>, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200503082646/https://theeasternlink.com/aranachal-in-latest-chinese-maps-as-border-region-of-south-tibet/>. The Dawanews/Duowei article assumes that the current national-level claim line (excluding Pagsamlung and including Chagdzom) dates from 1989, but it shows that county-level maps in the 2010s included Pagsamlung and did not include the Chagdzom area as part of China. The online Chinese commentator Menghuihutu says that the larger claim area (including Pagsamlung) is still maintained by China's National Geographic Placename Database. See also <https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/3964691#map=11/27.9530/90.9806&layers=D>.

106 The administrative boundaries of the Chagdzom\_Chhusa chhiwog follow major rivers rather than ridges, so the western half of the chhiwog includes the east bank of the Lower Jakarlung and the mountains overlooking it on the east. The Chinese claim to the Beyul follows ridge lines, except in the case of the Chagdzom claim.

107 See the administrative maps issued by Lhuentse dzongkhag in 2011 ("Demarcation Commission: for use in the 2011 Local Government Election", [http://www.](http://www.election-bhutan.org.bt/2011/finaldelimitation/huentse.pdf)

[election-bhutan.org.bt/2011/finaldelimitation/huentse.pdf](http://www.election-bhutan.org.bt/2011/finaldelimitation/huentse.pdf)).

108 See Bod rang skyong ljong srid 'dzin sa khul gyi sa bkra (Tibet Autonomous Region Administrative Area Map), TAR Survey and Mapping Bureau, Lhasa, September 1981 (reproduced by Tibet Information Network, London, 1994).

109 In practice, because the valley-sides in the Lower Jakarlung are too steep for a traveller to follow the river in its lower reaches, travellers between Bhutan and Tibet could also use a route north from Sergong la along the ridge on the east flank of the Beyul up to the Yangjug la pass and from there down to Khomting monastery in Lhakhang in Tibet. This route was only possible in the summer months.

110 See "行摄北北-自驾游 第三季 (16) 拉康镇-拉郊乡-德玛隆村 解锁德玛隆 冷母拉松垭口 填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南" (Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmula Pass ...), 行摄北北 (Travelling to the North) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hTf>.

111 The Bhutanese government referred to the Yangjug la as marking its border in the north-east of the Beyul in the 2004 statement of the Secretary for International Boundaries, Dasho Pema Wangchuk, "Proceedings of the 82nd National Assembly," Pt. VI, "Border Talks", June 2004, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/82%20session.pdf>. OpenStreetMap gives three slightly different locations for the Yangjug la. Other sources give different names for the various passes north of Demalong. These passes are situated at the head of the Semalong valley, which runs from the crest southwards to the "elbow" of the Jakarlung. Gansser (Geological Map of the Bhutan Himalaya, 1963-77) and Hollister (Trekking Map of Northern Bhutan, 1988) have "Bomba la" for the westernmost of these passes. Maps issued by the Department of Survey and Land Records of Bhutan's Ministry of Agriculture maps in 2000 and 2006 have Gang la for the south-easternmost of these passes. US Military maps (such as NH46-13, 1954) and Tibet Map Institute (Sheet 2891, Serie 151, December 2014) have Lhodrag la for that pass, but that name has not so far been found in Tibetan or Bhutanese sources.

112 Gusang Danzeng, "[跟着总书记看西藏]边境有我们, 请祖国放心!" ([Follow the General Secretary to visit Tibet] Please rest assured, motherland, we are here at the border!), 中国西藏网 (China Tibet Net), October 15, 2022, [http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-10/15/content\\_42139043.htm](http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-10/15/content_42139043.htm).

113 Robert Barnett, with Matthew Akester, Ronald Schwartz and two unnamed others, "China Is Using Tibetans as Agents of Empire in the Himalayas", Foreign Policy, July 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/28/china-tibet-bhutan-empire-borders-villages/>.

114 "In 2001, Bhutanese sentries patrolled the disputed area and forcibly escorted 31 of our border residents who were collecting Cordyceps to the Bhutanese sentry post. Six days later, one of the border residents escaped and reported back." Xu Lan, 2020年西藏山南深度行 (Tibet Shannan In-depth Tour), November 11, 2022, 美篇 (Meipian), <https://www.meipian.cn/4dz36nrm>. The Bhutanese Foreign Minister noted "Tibetans crossing into Bhutan searching for the medicinal herb, Yartsa Guenbub, were given severe and unwarranted punishment at Pasamlung by the Bhutanese border security" ("Bhutan-China Relation", Bhutan News Online, October 25, 2002, [https://web.archive.org/web/20021024231629/http://www.bhutannewsonline.com/bhutan\\_china.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20021024231629/http://www.bhutannewsonline.com/bhutan_china.html)).

115 "The Bumthang Chimi [submitted that the people of Bumthang Dzongkhag would like to bring to the notice of the National Assembly that Tibetan herdsmen have been constructing sheds in Majathang and Jakarlung area between Namgung and Orongla" ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 74th Session of the National Assembly Of Bhutan Held from 28th June to 19th July, 1996," Section VII, Bhutan-China Boundary Talks, July 1996, <https://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/74%20session.pdf>).

116 See note 114 above.

117 "The Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army ... informed the members that, in 1959, while he was on a patrol of the northern border..., he had come across Tibetan refugees who had camped at Majathang and Jakarlung, and had even started cultivating crops. These refugees greeted him very warmly and offered him gifts of yak, horses and mules, and asked him not to send them back to Tibet." ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 74th Session of the National Assembly Of Bhutan Held from 28th June to 19th July, 1996," Section VII, Bhutan-China Boundary Talks, July 1996, <https://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/74%20session.pdf>).

118 Samten Yeshi, "A new role for the nomads: to secure the border by maintaining their territorial identity," Kuensel, March 19, 2011, [http://www.raon.ch/pages/bt/ecdu/bt\\_ecoyak06.html](http://www.raon.ch/pages/bt/ecdu/bt_ecoyak06.html).

119 "行走洛扎秘境: 看! 喜马拉雅深处的巨变" (Walking in the secret land of Luozha: Look! Great changes in the depths of the Himalayas), Xinhuanet, February 15, 2022, [http://www.news.cn/politics/2022-02/15/c\\_1128376098.htm](http://www.news.cn/politics/2022-02/15/c_1128376098.htm).

120 "I found my eldest uncle, Suolang Punpei, my second uncle, Mingjiu Zhaxi, my cousin, Ciwang Danzeng, and my cousin, Pingcuo Luobu. I worked on their thoughts for more than half a month, persuading them to go to the Jiuluobu grazing site in Baiyu area to defend the land and consolidate the border. "If you don't support my work, how can I lead other villagers..."" (Gusang Danzeng, "[跟着总书记看西藏]边境有我们, 请祖国放心!" ([Follow the General Secretary to visit Tibet] Please rest assured, motherland, we are here at the border!), 中国西藏网 (China Tibet Net), October 15, 2022, [http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-10/15/content\\_42139043.htm](http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-10/15/content_42139043.htm)).

121 As noted above, medical facilities seem to have been overlooked in the north-eastern CBVs, and it appears that no clinics had been established as of 2024. See "医院动态 | 跨越3000公里的情谊! 他们将温暖送到天边边..." (Hospital News | Friendship spanning 3,000 kilometers! They send warmth to the end of the

world...), 联勤保障部队第980医院 (980th Joint Logistics Support Force Hospital) Weixin channel, June 5 2024, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/qu\\_nGEoz363j9Dr\\_Nys-lw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/qu_nGEoz363j9Dr_Nys-lw).

122 “一句承诺就是一生的坚守——山南市洛扎县拉郊乡党委书记古桑旦增守边富民记。” (A promise is a lifelong commitment – Gusang Danzeng, Secretary of the Party Committee of Lajiao Township, Luozha County, Shannan Municipality, guards the border and enriches the people), 西藏日报 (Tibet Daily), June 3, 2017, [https://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw\\_702/zh\\_711/201706/t20170603\\_553088.html](https://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw_702/zh_711/201706/t20170603_553088.html), archived at [https://web.archive.org/web/20210409094139/http://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw\\_702/zh\\_711/201706/t20170603\\_553088.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20210409094139/http://www.vtibet.cn/vtibet/xw_702/zh_711/201706/t20170603_553088.html).

123 Ji Chunhong and Zhao Yuhao, “光明网”“守边不忘富民 中不边境线上的忠诚卫士” (Guarding the border without forgetting to enrich the people, loyal guards on the China-Bhutan border), 光明网 (Guangming.com), August 28, 2019, [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190828\\_6672484.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/wx/201908/t20190828_6672484.html).

124 One of the residents – the son of one of the original four herders – was made the Party Secretary of the Jieliuobu village Party committee, but his role would have been nominal, since a team of outside officials was installed at Jieliuobu as a “village-resident cadre workteam”, led by a “First Secretary”, who would in fact have run the village. See “在洛扎，民族团结之花开得如此绚丽！” (In Luozha, the flower of national unity blooms so splendidly!), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/usSPTpe0rdaWFCJelIEZw>.

125 “The People’s Representative of Lhuntsi reported that the historical and traditional boundary at Menchuma sector of the Bhutan-China border were along Gengla, Menchuma, Sakardung-pek-sum, Npa-leu-sum, Zambotshering, Metse zur-sum, Bagar-lhang-sum and Bodla.” “Thursday, March 29, 1990: SPECIAL BULLETIN - Proceedings and Resolutions of the 69th Session of the National Assembly,” National Assembly Secretariat, reproduced by Kuensel.

126 John Claude White, *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-One Years on the North-East Frontier 1887-1908*, London: Edwin Arnold, 1909, p. 198.

127 The map issued by the Department of Survey and Land Records maps of Bhutan’s Ministry of Agriculture, 2006, and the 2011 administrative maps issued by Lhuentse dzongkhag (“Delimitation Commission: for use in the 2011 Local Government Election”), <http://www.election-bhutan.org.bt/2011/finaldelimitation/lhuentse.pdf> do not include the Menchuma area.

128 Samten Yeshi, “A new role for the nomads: to secure the border by maintaining their territorial identity,” Kuensel, March 19, 2011, [http://www.raon.ch/pages/bt/ecdu/bt\\_ecoyak06.html](http://www.raon.ch/pages/bt/ecdu/bt_ecoyak06.html).

129 These outposts, manned by border police from the National Immigration Administration, were numbered “Demalong No. 1”, “Demalong No. 2”, and so forth, but many were temporary locations in the forest, sometimes consisting just of plastic stretched between two trees. Later trees were cut down with which the police built wooden shacks. It is unclear why all these outposts were needed. See “原始森林里荒野求生 西藏山南拉郊边境派出所移民管理警察戍边记” (Survival in the wild in the primeval forest: Immigration administration police guard the border at the Lajiao Border Police Station in Shannan, Tibet), 中国新闻网, China News Network, April 12, 2023, [https://www.sohu.com/a/665960062\\_123753](https://www.sohu.com/a/665960062_123753).

130 “赵天武深入边境一线调研督导工作” (Zhao Tianwu went to the border to investigate and supervise the work), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, February 28, 2021, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/BD\\_zfW-YPOnJ28mjfPmEkA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/BD_zfW-YPOnJ28mjfPmEkA). Previously the main military base in the Beyul, judging from satellite images, was the compound constructed in 2020 in the Upper Jakarlung, 1km east of what became Basanglong new village. That base was demolished to make way for Semalong in mid-2023.

131 See video of Zhao’s visit to the troops to mark Chinese New Year, 2023 (“[网络中国节·农历新年]赵天武深入边境一线调研并慰问执勤干部群众” ([Online Chinese Festival - Tibetan New Year] Zhao Tianwu went deep into the front line of the border to conduct research and express his condolences to the cadres and masses on duty), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, February 18, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Q2zlvY-qZUxPMQ50bJKMQ>. The same video shows a platoon of 20 PLA soldiers on duty at Jieliuobu.

132 See “行摄北北-自驾游第三季 (16) 拉康镇-拉郊乡-德玛隆村解锁德玛隆冷母拉松垭口填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南” (Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmula Pass ...), 行摄北北 (Travelling to North) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e-7hT7>. At 15’42’.

133 “医院动态 | 跨越3000公里的情谊! 他们将温暖送到天边……” (Hospital News | Friendship spanning 3,000 kilometers! They send warmth to the end of the world...), 联勤保障部队第980医院 (980th Joint Logistics Support Force Hospital) Weixin channel, June 5, 2024, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/qu\\_nGEoz363j9Dr\\_Nys-lw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/qu_nGEoz363j9Dr_Nys-lw).

134 The Tibetan or Dzongkha name on which the Chinese name “Basanglong” is based is probably the same as the name of the valley on the western side of the Beyul, the Pagsamlung (Dpag bsam lung). However, the Chinese versions of these two names differs: Chinese sources refer to the valley in the western Beyul as “Basangnong” (巴桑弄) and to the village in the north as “Basanglong” (巴桑隆). Chinese media reports also refer to a location with a similar name – Basangzai (巴桑仔), sometimes written as Basangzi (巴桑孜) - but this is not the name of a village, but of a “duty point” or outpost (apparently manned by civilians), which seems to be on a high pass near Demalong. On Basangzai, see “赵天武深入边境一线督导检查工作” (Zhao Tianwu went

to the border to supervise and inspect the work), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, March 21, 2022, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5eOBxJ3YcK-91uknzz\\_-fnw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5eOBxJ3YcK-91uknzz_-fnw).

135 The Tibetan or Dzongkha name on which the Chinese name “Basanglong” is based is probably the same as the name of the valley on the western side of the Beyul, the Pagsamlung (Dpag bsam lung). However, the Chinese versions of these two names differs: Chinese sources refer to the valley in the western Beyul as “Basangnong” (巴桑弄) and to the village in the north as “Basanglong” (巴桑隆). Chinese media reports also refer to a location with a similar name – Basangzai (巴桑仔), sometimes written as Basangzi (巴桑孜) - but this is not the name of a village, but of a “duty point” or outpost (apparently manned by civilians), which seems to be on a high pass near Demalong. On Basangzai, see “赵天武深入边境一线督导检查工作” (Zhao Tianwu went to the border to supervise and inspect the work), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, March 21, 2022, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5eOBxJ3YcK-91uknzz\\_-fnw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5eOBxJ3YcK-91uknzz_-fnw).

136 Liu Feng, Dawa Ceren, Zhang Tao, Deji, Zhuoga and Zhaxi Baima, “山南市: “杰罗布是我们永远的家”” (Shannan Municipality: “Jieliuobu is our home forever”), 西藏日报 (Tibet Daily), July 14, 2022, <http://xz.people.com.cn/n2/2022/07/14/c138901-40037629.html>.

137 Liu Feng, Dawa Ceren, Zhang Tao, Deji, Zhuoga and Zhaxi Baima, “山南市: “杰罗布是我们永远的家”” (Shannan Municipality: “Jieliuobu is our home forever”), 西藏日报 (Tibet Daily), July 14, 2022, <http://xz.people.com.cn/n2/2022/07/14/c138901-40037629.html>.

138 See “社会实践报道 (二十五) | 不畏边关风雪, 筑隼河山万里情——“嘉措起航”社会实践团纪实” ([Social Practice Report (Twenty-Five)] I Un-afraid of the wind, frost and snow at the border, firmly building a love for the mountains and rivers - a record of the “Gyatso Sets Sail” social practice team), 北邮风流 (North Post Romance) Weixin channel, August 23, 2023,

[https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/?\\_\\_biz=MzA4MDQyMjAxNQ==&mid=2650971851&idx=&sn=eefe989907423dca5de0608fba60056f&chksm=84524bdb325c2cdd34ed4fd83bd441d099a4988f6188cb3c4f26c793bf7405441600a65b4&scene=27](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/?__biz=MzA4MDQyMjAxNQ==&mid=2650971851&idx=&sn=eefe989907423dca5de0608fba60056f&chksm=84524bdb325c2cdd34ed4fd83bd441d099a4988f6188cb3c4f26c793bf7405441600a65b4&scene=27).

139 See “西藏山南市洛扎县拉康镇民改玛 (三期) 抵边搬迁工程” (Minjuma [Phase III] Arrival and Relocation Project of Lakang Town, Luozha County, Shannan Municipality, Tibet), procurement document, November 19, 2020, [www.gongcheng168.cn/showinfo-64-596994-1.html](http://www.gongcheng168.cn/showinfo-64-596994-1.html), archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20210430100431/http://www.gongcheng168.cn/showinfo-64-596994-1.html>.

140 There are two passes known as the Gang la (sometimes written as Gong la or Geng la) in the same area. One is on the south of the Menchuma gorge, while the other one is north of Demalong, at the head of the Semalong valley and close to or the same as the Yangjug la.

141 “微信公众平台洛扎县委、政府主要领导深入松布曲检查指导当前重点工作, 现场办公解决存在的问题” (The main leaders of the Luozha County Party Committee and the government went to Songbuqu to inspect and guide the current key tasks, and worked on-site to solve existing problems), 秘境洛扎 (The Secret Realm of Luozha) Weixin channel, March 9, 2024, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/mgxjWatTF5x2l-tAeyCTRKA>.

142 See “#Update: New Pangda style village popped up in upper Kuri Chu valley along the Bhutan - Tibet frontier at 27.99425° N, 91.16452° E.” Twitter (X) posting by @NatureDesai, September 16, 2024, <https://x.com/NatureDesai/status/1835583241056653782>. The new village, probably called Edongqiao, resembles Pangda in terms of size, design and lay-out. It is c.400m north of the traditional border at the Kuruchu tshozam (Ngodong zampa, Ch.: Edongqiao).

143 See “西藏山南市洛扎县拉郊乡德玛隆抵边搬迁工程” (Demalong Arrival and Relocation Project in Lajiao Township, Luozha County, Shannan Municipality, Tibet), procurement document, November 19, 2020, at <http://www.gongcheng168.cn/showinfo-64-596993-1.html>. Archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20210430100511/http://www.gongcheng168.cn/showinfo-64-596993-1.html>.

144 This construction phase seems to have been treated by the authorities as Phase 1 of the construction of Demalong village, probably because the initial three buildings built before Phase 1 were regarded as preliminary or provisional.

145 See “行摄北北-自驾游第三季 (16) 拉康镇-拉郊乡-德玛隆村解锁德玛隆冷母拉松垭口填坑干活保通行 #行摄北北#自驾游#西藏#山南” (Travelling to the North - Self-driving Tour Season 3 (16) Lakang Town ~ Lajiao Township ~ Demalong Village - Unlocking the Demalong Lengmula Pass ...), 行摄北北 (Travelling to North) Video blog, December 12, 2023, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wN4y1e7hT7>.

146 “38户日喀则搬迁户喜迁山南德玛隆村抵边新居——藏建科技装配式建筑又添一景” (38 relocated households in Shigatse happily moved to new homes in Demalong Village, Shannan, near the border - Tibetan construction technology prefabricated buildings add another scene), 西藏工商联 (Tibet Federation of Industry and Commerce) Weixin channel, December 29, 2023,

[https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/?\\_\\_biz=Mz14N4NTA2MzMyOA==&mid=2649665564&idx=&sn=94a54fb4d54ca38af361eb6a55cb1256&chksm=33ebf1d3c49c78c531bac9477a-58e60535c4df35f4107a0fb42df48e6380c95f4cef0b7b1e&scene=27](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/?__biz=Mz14N4NTA2MzMyOA==&mid=2649665564&idx=&sn=94a54fb4d54ca38af361eb6a55cb1256&chksm=33ebf1d3c49c78c531bac9477a-58e60535c4df35f4107a0fb42df48e6380c95f4cef0b7b1e&scene=27).

147 The total number of households at Demalong following what we call its Phase 4 expansion (May to December 2023) was expected to be 235 (see previous footnote). It is not clear if this number includes the adjoining village, which we believe is Demalong

2, and which we estimate has 145 family-sized units.

148 “洛扎县拉郊乡色德沃房建设项” (Sedewo Housing Construction Project in Lajiao Township, Luozha County), September 27, 2019, Bidchance.com, <https://www.bidchance.com/info-freezjxm-4725593.html>.

149 Comment by user “Aric”, October 22, 2022, responding to posting by 地图观不丹 (Menghuihutu, Dreams Back to Confusion) about Chinese visitors to the Rinchen Bumpa mountain-peak monastery in the far eastern perimeter of the Beyul, “[白玉地区南部的越界]” (Crossing the border in the southern part of the Baiyu (Beyul) area), Blogpost, April 8, 2023, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/575813647>.

150 See “2023年洛扎县人民政府工作报告” (2023 Work Report of the People’s Government of Luozha County), Luozha County Government Office, January 9, 2023, [http://www.luozha.gov.cn/zwgk/gzbg/202308/t20230801\\_123066.html](http://www.luozha.gov.cn/zwgk/gzbg/202308/t20230801_123066.html). See also Jack Lau, “Chinese village construction in disputed zone outpaces China-Bhutan border talks,” South China Morning Post, February 18, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3251394/chinese-village-construction-disputed-zone-outpaces-china-bhutan-border-talks>.

151 “Le Doklam est un point de jonction entre l’Inde, la Chine et le Bhoutan. Ce n’est pas au Bhoutan seul de régler le problème. Nous sommes trois” (Doklam is a junction between India, China and Bhutan. It is not for Bhutan alone to solve the problem. There are three of us). Sabine Verhest, “On ne peut pas rester pauvre éternellement, mais devenir riche très rapidement n’est pas nécessaire non plus,” La Libre Belgique, March 25, 2023, <https://www.lalibre.be/international/asie/2023/03/25/on-ne-peut-pas-rester-pauvre-eternellement-mais-devenir-riche-tres-rapidement-est-pas-necessaire-non-plus-7BMTWQVCB-JCITB23YWSDZMSHOY/>.

152 “西藏出台规划确保边境地区如期全面建成小康” (Tibet releases plan to ensure border areas become moderately prosperous as scheduled), 中国民族报 (China Nationalities Newspaper), December 4, 2017, [http://www.tibetol.cn/html/2017/xizangyaowen\\_1204/35683.html](http://www.tibetol.cn/html/2017/xizangyaowen_1204/35683.html).

153 “According to ‘the Plan for the Construction of Well-off Villages in Border Areas of the Tibet Autonomous Region (2017-2020),’ RMB 3.7 billion will be invested in industrial development during the 13th Five-Year Plan period. In accordance with the principle of ‘farming where suitable, animal husbandry where suitable, forestry where suitable, industry where suitable, commerce where suitable, and tourism where suitable,’ each border village will implement one industrial project, actively cultivate new business entities, and vigorously develop characteristic and advantageous industries such as breeding and farming, agricultural product processing, ethnic handicrafts, tourism services, border commerce, and resource development. This will ensure that by 2020, border areas will build a well-off society in an all-round way together with people of all ethnic groups across the country.”

154 On labour migration in Tibet, see Andrew M. Fischer, “The Great Transformation of Tibet? Rapid

Labor Transitions in Times of Rapid Growth in the Tibet Autonomous Region,” Himalaya XXX (1-2) 2010: 63-77. See also Yang Danxu, “Poverty alleviation in Tibet: For young Tibetans, material wealth and city life beckon,” Lianhe Zaobao, December 4, 2020, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/society/poverty-alleviation-tibet-young-tibetans-material-wealth-and-city-life-beckon>.

155 Xi Jinping announced his tifa or key formula for Tibet policy at the meeting with the Tibet delegation at the first session of the 12th National People’s Congress in 2013, in his first week as Chairman (President) of China. The formula is “To govern the nation, we must govern our borders; to govern our borders, we must first ensure stability in Tibet.” The short form is zhibian wenZang (治边稳藏, “govern borders, settle Tibet”). See 治边稳藏 (Managing the border and stabilizing Tibet), Baike.baidu online encyclopedia entry, updated June 4, 2016, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/治边稳藏>, citing Jin Haibo and Wan Jinpeng, “深刻领会“治边稳藏”精神扎实推进西藏长治久安” (Deeply understand the spirit of ‘governing the border and stabilizing Tibet’ and solidly promote long-term stability in Tibet), 西藏发展论坛 (Tibet Development Forum) 2013 Issue 2: 53-56, [https://www.zhangqiaokeyan.com/academic-journal-cn\\_theoretical-plat-form-tibetan-development\\_thesis/0201234653595.html](https://www.zhangqiaokeyan.com/academic-journal-cn_theoretical-plat-form-tibetan-development_thesis/0201234653595.html).

156 The radome is on a ridge to the north above Majiatang. See “Most puzzling is the unexplained tower, many metres high, on a ridge above Gyalaphug at 27°59’17.37”N, 90°55’23.11”E, altitude 4,978m,” @RobbieBarnett, May 8, 2021, <https://x.com/RobbieBarnett/status/1390850141339492353>.

157 The group of buildings with possible satellite dishes, overlooking the Pagsamlung, 2.6km south-west of Ngarab la, is at 27°56’45.16”N, 90°51’38.56”E, altitude 4,492m asl (identified by Nathan Ruser @Nrg8000).

158 A US military publication has made a similar assessment: “The PRC seems to be incrementally and systematically advancing territorial claims along the border [with Bhutan] to gain favorable access routes through the Himalayas in a potential conflict with India” (“Topic: Border Dispute Between China And Bhutan,” USINDOPACOM J06/SJA TACAID SERIES, March 11 2024, [https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC-BHUTAN%20BORDER%20DISPUTE%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC-BHUTAN%20BORDER%20DISPUTE%20(FINAL).pdf)).

159 See 猫咪纪实说 (Maomijishishuo), “中不边境争端, 藏南战略要地白玉地区, 我国已实控60%” (In the China-Bhutan border dispute, my country has actual control over 60% of the strategic Baiyu area in southern Tibet), NetEase, April 16, 2024, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/IVT8LT000540RMZ3.html>.

160 The Chinese term “Lulin” is often used to refer to both the Charitang and the Yak

valleys.

161 The kindergarten at Pangda 1 is referred to in the image here: “SJUDRI - 精品案例 | 上海对口援藏25年典范-亚东县边境小康示范村(虎达村)建设” (SJUDRI - Excellent Case | Shanghai’s 25-year Model of Paired Assistance to Tibet - Construction of a Well-off Demonstration Village (Pangda Village) in the Border Area of Yadong County), 上海交通大学设计研究总院 (Shanghai Jiaotong University Design and Research Institute) Weixin channel, April 3, 2021, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/T0rAQ\\_QYXrkfletfYP93QQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/T0rAQ_QYXrkfletfYP93QQ).

162 Snehes Alex Philip, “New Chinese village in Bhutan? China journalist’s tweet starts row, Thimphu denies encroachment”, The Print, November 22, 2020, <https://theprint.in/defence/new-chinese-village-in-bhutan-china-journalists-tweet-starts-row-thimphu-denies-encroachment/549781/>.

163 In late 2023, some articles appeared by individual commentators in semi-official channels in China that referred to “claims” in foreign media that the area was disputed. As one put it, “the specific locations of these infrastructures on the satellite images are most likely in the areas that China and Bhutan have already agreed on” (蒋福伟 (Jiang Fuwei), “卫星昼夜紧盯边境, 西方发现不得了的事, 中国开始“收复”失地?” (Satellites are watching the border day and night, and the West has found out something great, China is starting to “regain” the lost ground?), Blogpost, December 6, 2023, [https://www.sohu.com/a/741912245\\_121451138](https://www.sohu.com/a/741912245_121451138)).

164 “Proceedings and Resolutions of the 83rd Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan,” Section V, “Bhutan-China Border”, June, 2005, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/83%20session.pdf>.

165 Tshethangka is named in “Proceedings and Resolutions of the 82nd Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan,” Section VI, Border Talks, 2004, p. 77, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/82%20session.pdf>.

166 “The Chinese outpost at Wuchu is one of the biggest PLA posts that was built a long time back. One of the roads constructed last year was from the Chinese outpost at Wuchu towards Pangkala [Ch.: Banggala]. Bhutan had already put forward to the Chinese that the border in this area goes along the Pangkala ridge” (“Proceedings and Resolutions of the 83rd Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan,” Section V “Bhutan-China Border”, June, 2005, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/83%20session.pdf>). A newspaper version of the statement included more detail: “On August 27, 2004, the Chinese started constructing a motor road from Wuchumakhang [Wuchu Military Base] towards Pangka La Chorten [reliquary], an area where the claim line was along Pangka La” (statement of Dasho Pema Wangchuk, cited in “Assembly members alarmed by road construction across northern boundary,” Kuensel, June 8, 2005, p. 3).

167 See 帮嘴拉抵边小康村 (Bang ga la dibian xiaokang cun), <https://www.openstreetmap.org/way/1127394073#map=16/27.49681/89.01087>.

168 The Chinese had made an earlier attempt to start the road in 2004, but had halted the work for a time after protests by Bhutan. “In October, 2004, the Chinese started constructing a motor road from Langmarpo Chhu towards Phutegang ridge, overlooking Charithang valley in Bhutan. The traditional boundary in this area lay along Langmarpo Chhu” (statement of Dasho Pema Wangchuk, cited in “Assembly members alarmed by road construction across northern boundary,” Kuensel, June 8, 2005, p. 3).

169 See Song Xiaoli, “普珍拉“桃花源”记” (Puzhenla’s “Peach Blossom Land”), June 30, 2017, 解放军生活 (People’s Liberation Army Life), <https://m.fx361.com/news/2017/0630/1984085.html>.

170 “Lies on border villages aim to turn Bhutan, India against China”, Opinion: First Voice, CGTN, May 24, 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-24/Lies-on-border-villages-aim-to-turn-Bhutan-India-against-China-10wAl4N9QvC/index.html>. Bhutan made numerous protests to China about incursions in the early 2000s, and again in 2017, but there are no public reports of Bhutan making formal protests to China after the Doklam incident in summer 2017.

171 Vishnu Som, “China Sets Up Village Within Bhutan, 9 Km From Doklam Face-Off Site”, NDTV, November 20, 2020, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/china-sets-up-village-within-bhutan-9-km-from-doklam-face-off-site-2327563>.

172 Snehes Alex Philip, “New Chinese village in Bhutan? China journalist’s tweet starts row, Thimphu denies encroachment,” The Print, November 22, 2020, <https://theprint.in/defence/new-chinese-village-in-bhutan-china-journalists-tweet-starts-row-thimphu-denies-encroachment/549781/>.

173 Rudra Chaudhuri notes a general flexibility among officials regarding border issues: “National Assembly resolutions (much like official statements) on the disputed border with China are purposefully ambiguous. They leave enough space for future reconciliation. This, as a local official argued, ‘is needed’” (Rudra Chaudhuri, “Looking for Godot”, The Indian Express, September 3, 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/looking-for-godot-doklam-standoff-india-china-bhutan-neighbours/>, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20170902210644/http://indianexpress.com/article/india/looking-for-godot-doklam-standoff-india-china-bhutan-neighbours/>).

174 See note 184 above.

175 Tsering Shakya, “Bhutan can solve its border problem with China – if India lets it,” South China Morning Post, July 22, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170722024035/http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2103601/bhutan-can-solve-its-border-problem-china-if-india-lets-it>.

- 176 Robert Barnett, with Matthew Akester, Ronald Schwartz and two unnamed others, "China Is Building Entire Villages in Another Country's Territory," *Foreign Policy*, May 7, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/07/china-bhutan-border-villages-security-forces/>; Robert Barnett, with Matthew Akester, Ronald Schwartz and two unnamed others, "China Is Using Tibetans as Agents of Empire in the Himalayas," *Foreign Policy*, July 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/28/china-tibet-bhutan-empire-borders-villages/>.
- 177 Devjyot Ghoshal, Anand Katakam and Aditi Bhandari, "China steps up construction along disputed Bhutan border," *Reuters*, January 12, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/CHINA-BHUTAN/BORDER/zjvqknaryvxx/>.
- 178 These CBVs in western Bhutan were first identified in a Twitter thread by Detresfa (Damien Symonds of Intel Lab) in November 2021 ([https://x.com/detresfa\\_/status/1460970809871134727](https://x.com/detresfa_/status/1460970809871134727)). Additional details about CBVs were noted on crowd-mapping websites, notably OpenStreetMap, or provided on social media by online commentators such as @Detresfa, @Nature Desai, @Kautilya2, @Peter168 and others.
- 179 "Beaucoup d'informations circulent dans les médias sur les installations chinoises au Bhoutan. Nous n'en faisons pas une affaire parce qu'elles ne se trouvent pas au Bhoutan. Nous l'avons dit catégoriquement, il n'y a pas d'intrusion telle que mentionnée dans les médias" (A lot of information circulates in the media about Chinese settlements within Bhutan. We are not making noise because these are not in Bhutan. We have categorically said that there is no intrusion the way it is been mentioned in the media). Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, in Sabine Verhest, "On ne peut pas rester pauvre éternellement, mais devenir riche très rapidement n'est pas nécessaire non plus," *La Libre Belgique*, March 25, 2023, <https://www.lalibre.be/international/asie/2023/03/25/on-ne-peut-pas-rester-pauvre-eternellement-mais-devenir-riche-tres-rapidement-nest-pas-necessaire-non-plus-7BMWTQVCBJCITB23YWSZDZMSHOY/>.
- 180 Vishu Som, "China's Biggest Land Grab Carves Into Ancestral Areas Of Bhutan's Royal Family," *NDTV*, January 6, 2024, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/chinas-biggest-land-grab-carves-into-ancestral-areas-of-bhutans-royal-family-4811168>.
- 181 John Pollock and Damien Symon, "China takes more land in Bhutan before expected border deal," December 1, 2023, updated December 20, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2023-12/china-takes-more-land-bhutan-expected-border-deal>; Vishu Som, "China's Biggest Land Grab Carves Into Ancestral Areas Of Bhutan's Royal Family," *NDTV*, January 6, 2024, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/chinas-biggest-land-grab-carves-into-ancestral-areas-of-bhutans-royal-family-4811168>.
- 182 See Jack Lau, "Chinese village construction in disputed zone outpaces China-Bhutan border talks," *South China Morning Post*, February 18, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3251394/chinese-village-construction-disputed-zone-outpaces-china-bhutan-border-talks>
- 183 Fan Lingzhi and Bai Yunyi, "Pangda village hyped by Indian media as in Bhutan is Chinese territory, satellite images, documents show," *Global Times*, November 23, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1207785.shtml>.
- 184 "Lies on border villages aim to turn Bhutan, India against China," *Opinion: First Voice*, CGTN, May 24, 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-24/Lies-on-border-villages-aim-to-turn-Bhutan-India-against-China-10wAl4N9QvC/index.html>.
- 185 "Tactical Aids" (TACAID) are documents that "aim to accurately inform the reader of the law surrounding the specific subject matter," although they do "not necessarily represent the official positions [sic] of the U.S. government."
- 186 "TOPIC: The PRC's Land Borders Law", USINDOPACOM J06/SJA TACAID SERIES, October 23, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC%20LAND%20BORDERS%20LAW%20-%20FINAL.pdf>. The document included references to the construction of CBVs on the Doklam plateau, but this was an error: so far as is known, despite numerous military structures, there are no villages on that plateau. The nearest CBVs are to the east (Pangda 1 and 2) or north-east of the plateau (Langmapu, Banggala, Sairubu, etc).
- 187 "TOPIC: Border Dispute Between China And Bhutan", USINDOPACOM J06/SJA TACAID SERIES, March 11, 2024. [https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC-BHUTAN%20BORDER%20DISPUTE%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC-BHUTAN%20BORDER%20DISPUTE%20(FINAL).pdf). See also <https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/Legal/J06%20TACAID%20-%20PRC%20LAND%20BORDERS%20LAW%20-%20FINAL.pdf>. The TACAID document in effect contradicts a report prepared for the US Congress in 2023 by the Congressional Research Service (Joseph O. Yinusa & Maria A. Blackwood, Cong. Research Serv., "The Kingdom Of Bhutan", September 6, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10660>), which describes accounts of CBVs only as "claimed" and "alleged", and gives no references. A Senate draft resolution, S. RES. 75, of July 25, 2023 (<https://www.congress.gov/bills/118th-congress/senate-resolution/75/text>), referred to China's territorial claims in Bhutan and to China's construction of villages near the Indian border, but did not refer to villages constructed by China in Bhutan.
- 188 Emphasis in original.
- 189 John Bray, "Ladakhi and Bhutanese Enclaves in Tibet," *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, vol. 26, Summer 2012 (1997), [https://himalaya.socanrh.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/jbs/pdf/JBS\\_26\\_01.pdf](https://himalaya.socanrh.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/jbs/pdf/JBS_26_01.pdf).
- 190 "Regarding the changes of the shape of [the] Bhutan Map, it was explained to the Hon Members of the House that due to cartographic mistakes of the map in the olden days [areas] including the Kulagangri are in the old Map of Bhutan. On actual verification on the ground in 1980 it was found that Kulagangri lies well inside Tibetan territory and it takes two days walking distance from the actual border [to reach it]" Dasho Pema Wangchuk, Secretary for International Boundaries, December 9, 2009 ("Proceedings and Resolutions of the 4th Session of the National Assembly," Section IX, "Report on the Status of Bhutan-China Border Negotiations", December 11, 2009).
- 191 "Instead of retaining this clean border, the Bhutanese, under Indian MEA's guidance, in 1955...gave away the red hatched area to China" (Twitter thread, Kautilya3 (@Kautilya33), January 29, 2023, <https://x.com/Kautilya33/status/1619836856912445440>). The "clean border" was a line running north-northeast from near the Batang la to Asang (Asang) village on the Torsa, 1.2km upstream of the Langmarpo confluence. This line is still shown as Bhutan's border in the data provided by World Bank Official Boundaries, as of May 2024 ([https://datacatalogfiles.worldbank.org/ddh-published/0038272/DR0046659/wb\\_countries\\_admin0\\_10m.zip?versionId=2024-05-14T14:58:01.56964282](https://datacatalogfiles.worldbank.org/ddh-published/0038272/DR0046659/wb_countries_admin0_10m.zip?versionId=2024-05-14T14:58:01.56964282)). The "red-hatched" area ceded in 1955 lay between this line and the Amo chu (Torsa river), some 5kms to the east at the widest point.
- 192 See Menghuihutu (梦回糊涂, Dreams Back to Confusion), "[中不边界争端详述] (2021版原创)" ([Details of the China-Bhutan border dispute] (2021 original version)), Blogpost, November 22, 2021, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/436127559>.
- 193 Ibid.
- 194 The Wikipedia entry for Bji Gewog notes that number given by the Bhutanese authorities for the area of Bji gewog in Haa dzongkhag dropped from 832 sq kms in 2002, to 802 sq kms in 2012, according to the official statistics publication produced by the local administration ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bji\\_Gewog](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bji_Gewog)). For the post-2012 figure, see "Dzongkhag at a Glance: Haa Dzongkhag, 2016," Haa Dzongkhag Administration, 2016, <http://haa.gov.bt/index.php%70/downloads/dzongkhag-glance-2016>.
- 195 "Assembly members alarmed by road construction across northern boundary," *Kuensel*, June 8, 2005, pp. 1, 3.
- 196 "Proceedings and Resolutions of the 85th Session of the National Assembly," Section VIII, "Border Talks", 2006, <http://ipajournal.com/uploads/2011/parliament/Old%20NA/85%20session.pdf>.

