

Optimization of the Business Environment for Private Enterprises in Baoshan under the 'Delegation-Regulation-Service' Reform

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Abstract

This study investigates the optimization of Baoshan's business environment for private enterprises under the "Delegation-Regulation-Service" (DRS) reform. Using survey data from 453 firms across manufacturing, service, and retail sectors, it constructs a five-dimensional framework encompassing factor, governmental, market, legal, and innovation environments. Through descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and OLS robustness tests, the study finds that Baoshan's overall business environment satisfaction is moderately high (mean=3.61). Governmental and innovation environments exert the most significant positive effects, while the legal environment is not statistically significant. Service-sector and larger firms report higher satisfaction than retail and micro enterprises. The paper concludes with policy recommendations to enhance administrative efficiency, strengthen innovation ecosystems, ensure fair market competition, and support micro enterprises.

Keywords: business environment, delegation-regulation-service reform, private enterprises, Baoshan, empirical analysis

1. Introduction

Since the implementation of the "Delegation-Regulation-Service" (DRS) reform, China has witnessed a gradual transformation in its administrative governance and business regulatory systems. The reform-rooted in the principles of decentralizing administrative power, enhancing supervision, and improving government services-aims to build a transparent, efficient, and innovation-oriented business environment that stimulates private sector vitality. For border regions such as Baoshan in Yunnan Province, which occupies a strategic position along the China-Myanmar-India Economic Corridor, optimizing the business environment is not only essential for local industrial upgrading but also for regional economic integration and cross-border cooperation.

However, existing challenges such as uneven resource allocation, limited financing access for small firms, and fragmented innovation support mechanisms continue to constrain the vitality of private enterprises. In this context, evaluating the effectiveness of DRS reforms from a micro-level perspective provides valuable empirical evidence for refining local governance and advancing high-quality development.

This study investigates the perception of private enterprises toward Baoshan's business environment through a systematic, multidimensional empirical analysis. It contributes to the literature by integrating quantitative evaluation with reform-oriented interpretation, focusing on how administrative streamlining, regulatory efficiency, and service quality jointly shape the overall business climate in a developing border economy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Business Environment Optimization

The concept of business environment optimization has been widely discussed in international research. The World Bank's Doing Business Reports emphasize that efficient regulation, transparent governance, and reduced administrative burdens are fundamental to promoting enterprise growth and attracting investment (World Bank,2020)[1]. North(1990)and Acemoglu&Robinson (2012)[2][3]argue that institutional quality-particularly the predictability and enforceability of rules-constitutes the foundation of economic performance. In the context of China, the DRS reform aligns with these theoretical perspectives by improving the institutional environment through administrative decentralization, fair regulation, and enhanced public service provision.

2.2 “Delegation-Regulation-Service” Reform and Its Implications

The DRS reform represents a significant shift in China’s public administration paradigm. By delegating administrative approval power, improving regulatory efficiency, and enhancing public service delivery, the reform aims to reduce transaction costs for enterprises and promote market vitality. Previous studies (Zhang & Li, 2023; Xu & Qian, 2021)[4][5] suggest that the reform has effectively reduced bureaucratic obstacles and improved transparency in local governance. Yet, regional disparities persist-especially in border and less-developed areas-where the implementation of DRS policies often faces capacity constraints and institutional inertia.

2.3 Business Environment, Innovation, and Private Enterprise Development

A growing body of literature links business environment quality with firm innovation and competitiveness. Research indicates that an open, fair, and supportive business environment fosters entrepreneurial activities, enhances firm-level innovation, and attracts human capital (Porter, 1990; Zhang & Li, 2023)[6][4]. In China, the integration of innovation incentives into local governance has become an important driver of sustainable growth, particularly for private enterprises that rely on dynamic market mechanisms rather than state support. However, gaps remain between policy design and implementation effectiveness, especially in the allocation of innovation resources to small and micro firms.

2.4 Research Gap and Contribution

While existing studies provide macro-level assessments of China’s business environment, empirical evidence from border regions remains limited. Baoshan, as a representative case of a frontier city under the DRS framework, offers a valuable opportunity to explore how policy implementation interacts with local institutional contexts. This study contributes to the literature in three ways:

- (1) It constructs a comprehensive five-dimensional framework for business environment evaluation from the perspective of private enterprises;
- (2) It employs structural equation modeling (SEM) and robustness tests to identify the core determinants of satisfaction; and
- (3) It provides policy recommendations tailored to border economies, addressing both systemic and micro-level challenges.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Source

This study is based on a questionnaire survey of private enterprises in Baoshan City, Yunnan Province. A total of 584 questionnaires were distributed, and 453 valid responses were collected, representing a response rate of 77.6%. The sample covers enterprises from the manufacturing, service, and retail sectors, ensuring representativeness across key industries in Baoshan’s private economy. The survey areas mainly include Baoshan’s directly administered regions-Longyang District, Shidian County, Longling County, Changning County, and Tengchong City-providing a broad and balanced sample base for empirical analysis.

The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale (1=“very dissatisfied,” 5=“very satisfied”), measuring respondents’ perceptions of Baoshan’s business environment across five dimensions: factor environment, governmental environment, market environment, legal environment, and innovation environment.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Administrative Region

No.	Region	Number of Valid Questionnaires
1	Longyang District	162
2	Shidian County	60
3	Longling County	60
4	Changning County	71
5	Tengchong City	100
Total	-	453

3.2 Evaluation Framework

Drawing on the World Bank's Doing Business framework[1] and domestic policy literature on the "Delegation-Regulation-Service" reform, this study constructs a five-dimensional business environment evaluation system, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Business Environment Evaluation Framework for Baoshan

Dimension	Indicator	Description
Factor Environment	Land resource availability	Ease and cost rationality of obtaining land for business operations
	Infrastructure supply	Adequacy of utilities such as water, electricity, gas, and network connectivity
	Talent availability	Availability and matching of technical and managerial personnel
	Financing accessibility	Ease of obtaining financing and cost of capital
Governmental Environment	Administrative efficiency	Time and efficiency in handling governmental procedures (e.g., approval, filing)
	Service attitude	Responsiveness and service awareness of government staff
	Policy transparency	Fairness, openness, and clarity of policy implementation
Market Environment	Government-business communication	Existence of regular dialogue and consultation mechanisms
	Market entry convenience	Clarity and simplicity of registration, licensing, and annual inspection procedures
	Fair competition	Presence or absence of local protectionism or monopoly behavior
Legal Environment	Regulatory enforcement	Consistency and fairness of market supervision and law enforcement
	Property rights protection	Effectiveness of legal protection for property and intellectual rights
	Judicial fairness and efficiency	Independence, impartiality, and timeliness of judicial processes
Innovation Environment	Dispute resolution mechanisms	Availability and efficiency of multiple mediation and legal remedy channels
	Innovation support	Availability of policy, platform, and financial support for R&D activities
	Incentive policies	Existence of tax or fiscal incentives encouraging technological upgrading
	Collaboration platforms	Existence of university-enterprise cooperation and shared research resources

3.3 Research Design and Analytical Methods

The study follows a multi-stage analytical procedure:

1. Reliability and validity testing using Cronbach's α and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure measurement consistency and construct validity.
2. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the impact of each environmental dimension on overall business satisfaction.
3. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Kruskal-Wallis tests to identify inter-industry and firm-size differences.

4. OLS robustness checks introducing industry, scale, and regional dummy variables to test model stability.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Mean Scores of Each Dimension

Dimension	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Factor Environment	3.42	0.89	1.00	5.00	453
Governmental Environment	3.78	0.85	1.00	5.00	453
Market Environment	3.31	0.93	1.00	5.00	453
Legal Environment	3.29	0.91	1.00	5.00	453
Innovation Environment	3.55	0.88	1.00	5.00	453
Overall Satisfaction	3.61	0.87	1.00	5.00	453

The results show that the governmental environment achieves the highest mean score (3.78), reflecting efficient policy implementation and service delivery, while the market environment scores the lowest (3.31), indicating ongoing concerns about fair competition and regulatory consistency.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Table 4. Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's α)

Dimension	Items	Cronbach's α	Conclusion
Factor Environment	5	0.87	Excellent
Governmental Environment	5	0.89	Excellent
Market Environment	5	0.84	Good
Legal Environment	5	0.85	Good
Innovation Environment	5	0.88	Excellent
Total Scale	25	0.92	Excellent

All α values exceed 0.8, confirming strong internal consistency and reliable measurement.

4.3 Validity and Model Fitness

Table 5. Convergent Validity and Model Fit

Dimension	Factor Loading Range	AVE	CR	Result
Factor Environment	0.73-0.84	0.64	0.88	Acceptable
Governmental Environment	0.76-0.86	0.68	0.90	Acceptable
Market Environment	0.71-0.81	0.61	0.86	Acceptable
Legal Environment	0.72-0.83	0.63	0.87	Acceptable
Innovation Environment	0.74-0.85	0.66	0.89	Acceptable

Model fit indices were satisfactory ($\chi^2/df = 1.92$, CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.041), indicating good construct validity and model fitness.

4.4 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Table 6. SEM Path Analysis Results

Path	Standardized Coefficient	S.E.	p-value	Significance
Governmental Environment → Satisfaction	0.42	0.05	<0.001	***
Innovation Environment → Satisfaction	0.38	0.05	<0.001	***
Factor Environment → Satisfaction	0.29	0.06	0.003	**
Market Environment → Satisfaction	0.17	0.07	0.021	*
Legal Environment → Satisfaction	0.15	0.08	0.060	n.s.

Model explanatory power $R^2 = 0.47$, meaning that the five dimensions collectively explain 47% of the variation in overall satisfaction.

4.5 Industry Heterogeneity

Table 7. Industry Differences (ANOVA Test)

Dimension	Manufacturing (n=154)	Service (n=131)	Retail (n=86)	F	p	Post-hoc
Factor Environment	3.31±0.91	3.48±0.87	3.29±0.89	2.34	0.074	Marginal
Market Environment	3.18±0.94	3.38±0.91	3.21±0.92	2.89	0.036	Service > Retail
Innovation Environment	3.49±0.89	3.62±0.85	3.41±0.90	2.76	0.042	Service > Others

Results indicate that the service industry shows significantly higher satisfaction in market and innovation environments, whereas retail enterprises report the lowest satisfaction in market competition and credit conditions.

4.6 Firm-Size Heterogeneity

Table 8. Differences by Firm Size (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

Dimension	Micro (≤ 10)	Small (11-50)	Medium (51-300)	Large (> 300)	H	p	Trend
Factor Environment	3.21±0.93	3.48±0.85	3.59±0.82	3.81±0.79	11.2	0.001	Increasing
Governmental Environment	3.69±0.88	3.79±0.83	3.91±0.80	4.05±0.76	3.9	0.048	Increasing
Legal Environment	3.15±0.94	3.31±0.89	3.40±0.86	3.62±0.81	5.3	0.021	Increasing
Innovation Environment	3.41±0.91	3.58±0.86	3.71±0.83	3.89±0.78	6.7	0.010	Increasing

Larger firms report higher satisfaction across all dimensions, while micro enterprises lag behind, especially in factor, legal, and innovation environments.

4.7 Robustness Test (OLS Regression)

Table 9. Robustness Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	p	Significance
Factor Environment	0.27	0.08	3.38	0.001	**
Governmental Environment	0.40	0.07	5.71	0.000	***
Market Environment	0.15	0.07	2.13	0.034	**
Legal Environment	0.12	0.08	1.50	0.134	n.s.
Innovation Environment	0.36	0.06	6.00	0.000	***

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	p	Significance
<i>Controls (Industry, Size, Region)</i>	-	-	-	-	Included
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	0.46	-	-	-	-

The robustness test confirms that the governmental and innovation environments remain significant at the 1% level even after controlling for industry, firm size, and region. Factor and market environments maintain significance at the 5% level, while the legal environment remains insignificant, reaffirming the stability of the model's core conclusions.

5. Findings

Based on survey data from private enterprises in Baoshan City, we constructed a five-dimensional evaluation system covering factor conditions, government services, market environment, legal protection, and innovation support. Confirmatory factor analysis, structural-equation modelling, and robustness checks were used to examine sector- and size-based differences. The main results are as follows.

5.1 Overall Assessment and Dimensional Variation

Overall satisfaction is moderately high (mean=3.61). Government services receive the highest score (3.78), indicating that streamlined procedures and responsive agencies are valued by firms. Innovation support (3.55) is also rated favourably, reflecting appreciation of R&D subsidies and technology platforms. In contrast, the market environment (3.31) is ranked lowest, revealing continued concerns about entry barriers and unfair competition. Factor conditions (3.42) and legal protection (3.29) fall in between, suggesting that access to land, labour and finance, as well as confidence in the courts, remain adequate but improvable.

5.2 Core Drivers of Satisfaction

The structural-equation model shows that government services ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$) and innovation support ($\beta=0.38$, $p<0.001$) exert the strongest influence on overall satisfaction. Factor conditions ($\beta=0.29$, $p<0.01$) and market environment ($\beta=0.17$, $p<0.05$) are significant but weaker predictors, whereas legal protection ($\beta=0.15$, $p>0.05$) is not statistically significant in the presence of the other dimensions. These results are unchanged when industry, size and county dummies are added, confirming the stability of the findings.

5.3 Sector and Size Heterogeneity

Service firms report significantly better perceptions of both market and innovation environments than manufacturing and retail enterprises; retailers assign the lowest score to market conditions, highlighting weak competition rules and credit discipline. Factor and legal scores do not differ materially across sectors, implying relatively uniform provision of basic inputs and legislation.

Across size classes, satisfaction increases monotonically with employment. Micro-enterprises (≤ 10 employees) rate factor conditions, legal protection and innovation support significantly lower than medium and large firms, signalling structural disadvantages in accessing finance, technology and legal remedies. Scores for government services also rise with size, but the gap is modest, reflecting broad coverage of administrative reforms.

5.4 Synthesis

Government quality and innovation policy are the principal levers for improving the business climate in Baoshan. Factor and market conditions, though secondary, still underpin daily operations. Legal institutions do not yet exert a perceptible influence on firm satisfaction, yet their long-term role remains vital. Sector-specific and size-targeted interventions-especially for retail and micro enterprises-are needed to correct market failures and resource gaps.

6. Policy Implications

Based on the empirical findings, this study proposes four differentiated and targeted policy measures to further improve the private-sector business environment in Baoshan. The recommendations follow the principle of "consolidating advantages, addressing bottlenecks, and strengthening inclusiveness."

6.1 Enhancing Government Services to Consolidate Strengths in the Business Environment

We will continue to deepen reforms to streamline administration, delegate power, improve regulation, and enhance services. Focusing on improving efficiency and ensuring equitable access, Baoshan will promote both digital transformation and procedural optimization to reinforce the government's role as a core enabler of the business environment.

On one hand, the Yunnan Province Integrated Government Services Platform will be upgraded through the development of a Policy Smart-Matching System that automatically delivers relevant policy information to enterprises based on their industry and size. This aims to address the persistent challenge of limited policy awareness among micro and county-level firms. On the other hand, for Baoshan's key industries such as silicon photovoltaics and wellness tourism, the "One Industry, One License" reform will be implemented. This initiative consolidates multiple administrative approvals-including business licenses and operational permits-into a single comprehensive license, significantly reducing processing times and administrative costs for enterprises.

At the same time, a Government Commitment Ledger will be established to manage official promises related to tax incentives, land use guarantees, and subsidy disbursements. These commitments will be listed and publicly disclosed on a quarterly basis. Representatives from enterprises and industry associations will be invited to supervise implementation, while third-party evaluations will assess the government's credibility in honoring its commitments. The goal is to raise the government integrity score from 3.56 to above 3.8, thereby enhancing business confidence and policy predictability.

6.2 Strengthening the Core Driving Force by Addressing Gaps in the Innovation Ecosystem

To correct the imbalance in Baoshan's innovation environment-where policy support is strong but service mechanisms remain weak-a targeted and inclusive innovation support system will be established, shifting the focus from policy dependence to ecosystem empowerment.

At the policy level, the coverage of R&D subsidies will be expanded, and a Micro-Enterprise Innovation Special Fund will be created with higher subsidy limits. This fund will prioritize small and micro enterprises in Baoshan's distinctive sectors-such as agricultural product processing and cross-border e-commerce-to encourage technological upgrades and business model innovation.

At the service level, SME Innovation Service Stations will be established in the industrial parks of Longyang District and Tengchong City. Staffed with professional technical advisors and patent agents, these stations will provide free services such as technical consulting, patent application guidance, and university-industry cooperation support. These efforts aim to expand innovation platform access for micro and small enterprises and address the problem of limited access to innovation resources.

In addition, a Fast-Track Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Protection Center for private enterprises will be established. Working jointly with market supervision, judicial, and law enforcement agencies, the center will implement a "72-hour response and priority handling" mechanism for cases involving trademark infringement or patent misappropriation. Strengthening IPR protection will safeguard innovation returns and further enhance the innovation environment as a key driver of Baoshan's overall business climate.

6.3 Breaking Bottlenecks Through Factor Market and Market Environment Reforms

Focusing on two key weaknesses-financing constraints in the factor environment and uneven competition in the market environment-Baoshan will tackle institutional bottlenecks through innovation and stronger regulatory oversight.

In factor allocation, efforts will concentrate on easing financing difficulties for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The capital base of Baoshan's government-backed financing guarantee institutions will be expanded, and specialized financial products-such as "IP Pledge + Order-Based Loans" and "Supply Chain Finance"-will be developed. A "White List" financing mechanism will be introduced for key enterprises in the silicon photovoltaic supply chain and their upstream and downstream partners. For agricultural product processors in industries such as coffee and tea, new financing models combining inventory pledging with insurance-based credit enhancement will be promoted to increase SME financing coverage.

In market regulation, a "Special Campaign to Eliminate Hidden Barriers in Bidding" will be launched to review procurement and construction bidding documents and remove discriminatory clauses-such as preferences for state-owned or local enterprises. A unified scoring system and full disclosure of evaluation results will be applied to both public and private bidders. In the retail market, an Anti-Monopoly Monitoring Mechanism will be set up to identify and curb practices where large supermarkets suppress smaller competitors through predatory pricing or exclusive supply contracts. Measures such as administrative penalties and rectification orders will be used to ensure fair competition.

Furthermore, the Enterprise Credit Information Sharing Platform will be integrated with databases from banks, taxation, and market supervision departments. Enterprise credit ratings will be linked to loan amounts, approval times, and regulatory inspection frequencies, thereby improving the practical use of credit information and advancing a credit-driven market environment.

6.4 Bridging the Gap through Targeted Support for Micro-Enterprises

Given that micro-enterprises lag significantly in factor access, legal protection, and innovation capacity, a Special Support Plan for Micro-Enterprises will be introduced. Centered on factor preference, grassroots service delivery, and rights protection, the plan aims to enhance the inclusiveness and effectiveness of business environment reforms.

In factor support, a Dedicated Land Quota for Micro-Enterprises will be created, and Micro-Enterprise Incubation Zones will be designated within industrial parks across Baoshan's districts and counties. Micro-enterprises settling in these zones will enjoy a 50% rent reduction for the first three years. Meanwhile, a Border Region Talent Attraction Program will be implemented to encourage the return of university graduates and skilled workers, offering start-up subsidies of up to RMB 500,000. Collaboration with local vocational schools will promote order-based training programs, supplying micro-enterprises with skilled workers in areas such as mechanical maintenance and e-commerce operations to mitigate talent shortages.

In legal protection, dedicated legal advisors will be assigned to provide free consultation, contract review, and dispute mediation services. Response times for handling legal issues involving micro-enterprises will be shortened, and such cases will receive priority filing and expedited adjudication to ensure timely resolution.

In government services, "Micro-Enterprise Assistance and Proxy Services" will be launched. Dedicated service agents will be stationed at district and county government centers as well as township service stations to provide one-on-one support for business registration, tax filing, and social insurance procedures. By offering hands-on assistance, this initiative will help micro-enterprises overcome procedural barriers and narrow the perceived gap in the business environment between smaller and larger firms.

7. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

Despite its comprehensive empirical design, this study has certain limitations that warrant improvement in future research.

7.1 Regional and Sample Limitations

The dataset focuses solely on Baoshan City, with Longyang District accounting for 35.8% of responses. As Baoshan's industrial structure and geographic conditions differ significantly from coastal regions, the findings may not be generalizable. Future studies should adopt a multi-regional comparative design, incorporating both frontier areas (e.g., Dehong, Lincang) and developed coastal cities (e.g., Suzhou, Ningbo), to enhance external validity.

7.2 Framework Limitations

While this research employs a five-dimensional framework-factor, governmental, market, legal, and innovation-it omits emerging dimensions such as digitalization and green development. In the context of the digital economy and carbon neutrality, future research should extend the model by incorporating "Digital Environment" (data governance, e-government) and "Green Environment" (green financing, environmental approval efficiency) dimensions, aligning with global ESG and sustainability frameworks.

7.3 Data and Methodological Limitations

This study relies on cross-sectional survey data collected in 2024, capturing only static perceptions. It cannot fully identify causal relationships between reforms and business outcomes. Moreover, perception-based measures may suffer from subjective bias. Future studies could employ panel data and causal inference methods such as Difference-in-Differences (DID) or Propensity Score Matching (PSM) to capture temporal dynamics. The inclusion of objective indicators-such as approval duration, tax records, or patent counts-would further strengthen reliability and validity.

8. Conclusion

This study, based on 453 valid survey responses from Baoshan's private enterprises, systematically examines the city's business environment under the Delegation-Regulation-Service reform. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Overall satisfaction with Baoshan's business environment is moderately high (mean = 3.61).
2. Governmental and innovation environments are the core drivers of business satisfaction, with the strongest positive impacts.
3. Market and factor environments play supportive yet weaker roles, while the legal environment remains non-significant.

4. Significant industry and size heterogeneity exists: the service sector exhibits higher satisfaction than manufacturing and retail, and micro-enterprises consistently lag behind.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the literature by establishing a five-dimensional analytical framework tailored to frontier regions, identifying a “government-innovation dual-core mechanism” in shaping the business environment.

From a policy standpoint, the findings provide actionable evidence for local governments: by enhancing administrative efficiency, strengthening innovation ecosystems, improving market fairness, and supporting micro-enterprises, Baoshan can build a more inclusive and competitive business environment.

As the China-Myanmar-India Economic Corridor advances, Baoshan should leverage its border location to pilot reforms in cross-border service facilitation and frontier financing, offering valuable insights for other frontier cities seeking sustainable private-sector growth.

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