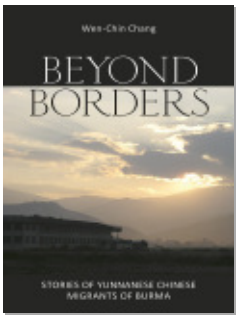
1. The Days in Burma: Zhang Dage



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Part I

Migration History

1

The Days in Burma

Zhang Dage

> Last night, I dreamed about poppy farms; a whole field was full of blooming poppies. . . . They were red, white, and purple, dancing in the wind. I was like a wild horse running in the field. From exhaustion, I fell on the bed of flowers. I told myself repeatedly . . . not to wake up if I still wanted to see the flowers.
>
> —Zhang Dage, 2002[1]

Zhang Dage, born in a mountain village in Shan State, Burma, in 1962, is one of my key informants. Like many Yunnanese migrants, his life has been marked by a series of migrations. Since 1980 he has settled in Taiwan, but every Chinese New Year he takes his family back to his parents' home in Reshuitang Xincun (often called Xincun), a primarily Yunnanese Han village in Chiang Mai Province in northern Thailand. We met there for the first time during the Chinese New Year in 1996 when I was conducting my doctoral fieldwork on the history of the KMT Yunnanese Chinese in northern Thailand (Chang 1999). At that time, many dependents of former high-ranking officers of the KMT Third Army still lived in this village.[2]

1. This is an extract from one of Zhang Dage's essays posted on his former weblog. *Dage* (senior brother) is an address for senior males of one's generation.

2. Xincun was founded in 1963 and named Ban Mai Nongbour in Thai. In 1995–1996 it was my major research site, with a population of nearly five thousand. The village has distinctive Yunnanese Chinese features reflected in its cultural organization and villagers' daily practices. I stayed there for approximately sixteen months, while making side trips to twenty-four other Yunnanese villages in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Provinces, gathering complementary data. Shu-min Huang published an ethnography on a KMT Yunnanese village focusing on its agriculture (2010).

When he heard about my Taiwanese origin and my research, Zhang Dage expressed great interest. He took me to his parents' orchard just outside the village and told me that in the future his parents would be buried there; he hoped to turn the orchard into a garden and open it to the public. I still remember Zhang Dage's words: "My parents' epitaphs would record Yunnanese history and culture and make the place a historical site. It is my wish to pass along our Yunnanese migration history to future generations."

Over the years he has shared a good number of his stories with me in person or by phone, and by letters, email, his weblog, and his Facebook page. These stories, with their references to mnemonic sites, persons, objects, and practices, reflect different stages of his life and provide valuable data regarding the migrant Yunnanese lifestyle, especially in the Shan State of Burma. Based on both his oral and written narratives, this chapter examines the localities, peoples, livelihoods, and times of Zhang Dage's early youth in Burma.

Letters from Zhang Dage

Dear Wen-Chin,

I'm very sorry for the delay in replying to you. It has been more than one month since I put your letter and the materials you requested in the briefcase that I carry from home to my clinic every day. You must have been waiting for my answer. I'm sorry to keep you waiting due to my busy schedule. How have you been?

I've asked my father for some documents for you. Regarding the flight from Yunnan after 1949, as I understand it, most people escaped in groups. The earlier arrivals helped those who came later. Before the Communist takeover, many Yunnanese had been involved in the border trade between Yunnan and Burma. Therefore, they were already familiar with the routes connecting the two countries. . . . While some Yunnanese who moved from the Shan State of Burma to the frontiers in northern Thailand found ways to migrate further to Chiang Mai, Bangkok, or even Taiwan, other Yunnanese kept moving inside Burma and Thailand. In a nutshell, the capable ones moved first and others followed. For human beings, the pursuit of a better life is anchored in persistent "hope."

[There were two general routes of flight from Yunnan to northern Shan State in Burma]. The first route connected Lashio via public roads [*gonglu*] with Taunggyi, Kengtung, Tachileik, then Mae Sai [in Thailand], and on to

different Yunnanese villages in Chiang Rai Province [along the border] such as Mantang and Meisile. The second route connected Tangyan [or Tangyang] via mountain tracks with Nanpoliang, Bianliang, then Bingnong [in Thailand], and then other Yunnanese villages in Chiang Mai Province, such as Dagudi, Tangwo, Reshuitang Xincun, and Wanyang.[3]

. . . Yunnanese emphasize connections with others from their hometowns who often provide useful help in migration. Before leaving for a strange place, one is often told to look for fellow Yunnanese in that new place. I recalled hearing such references frequently. However, one does not always receive help when it is required. Sometimes these connections yield no assistance at all. Such cases often aggravate hardships for migrants that resemble tragic plots in novels. In other words, one may experience either a warm or cold reception when interacting with other countrymen.

. . . I am very busy, but I am still interested in the history of Yunnanese migration, although I am not able to study it myself. I anticipate that your field research will keep the record for us, and I greatly appreciate your work.

Late last June, my mother was hospitalized for four days in Fang [Chiang Mai Province] for bleeding in her stomach. She has returned home and is being looked after by my younger brother. On June 29, my father finally decided to build their *shengji* [grave] in our orchard, following Yunnanese custom. I was happy with the decision. My mother had been talking about this for a long time. Although my father knows a bit of *fengshui* [geomancy], and could have easily settled this matter earlier, he hesitated for several reasons. He was afraid that the construction of the graves in our orchard might inhibit the expansion of the village in the future and also conflict with Thai regulations on the usage of farmland. . . . Nevertheless, my mother's recent illness has made him change his mind. As I mentioned to you before, I hope to turn this place into a public garden. The idea has nothing to do with social status, but a wish to pass on our history to the next generation. We will never sell this piece of land. It will forever be the site of remembrance of my parents, the first generation of our family in Thailand.

3. From Bianliang to Bingnong one still has to pass through many places in southern Shan State. The Thai names of the Yunnanese villages in Thailand referred to here are Ban Tham Santisuk (or Ban Tham) for Mantang (Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai Province); Ban Mae Salong for Meisile (Mae Fa Luang District, Chiang Rai Province); Ban Piang Luang for Bingnong (Wiang Haeng District, Chiang Mai Province); Ban Anuro Thai for Dagudi (Chiang Dao District, Chiang Mai Province); Ban Tham Ngob for Tangwo (Chaiprakan District, Chiang Mai Province); Ban Mai Nongbour for Reshuitang Xincun (or Xincun) (Chaiprakan District, Chiang Mai Province); and Ban Yang for Wanyang (Fang District, Chiang Mai Province). Besides fleeing to Shan State, many Yunnanese refugees escaped from Yunnan to Kachin State.

> Wen-Chin, I am writing this letter in bed as my child is sleeping sweetly next to me. In him, I see my past, my duty, and the continuity of the lives of the Yunnanese people. I wish you great success in your research. I will write to you further when I have more to share.
>
> Best wishes,
>
> Zhang Dage *July 26, 1998, 3:00 a.m.*

Zhang Dage's parents are from Longling in Yunnan. His father escaped to Burma in 1951 with a few male relatives. Like many fellow refugees who maintained the hope of fighting their way back to Yunnan, he joined the KMT guerrillas in their headquarters in Mong Hsat (southern Shan State) that year and remained in the KMT Third Army until 1986. In 1958, Zhang Dage's father sent a few men to bring his wife out of Yunnan. After the Communist takeover, very few people were able to escape with their entire family at once. In most cases, males between fifteen and fifty years old left first, with the intention of exploring the new environment and returning to Yunnan if the situation in China improved. They believed the Communists would not harm women, old people, and small children. Many refugees more or less followed the direction of the caravan trade routes into Burma, bypassing main roads in some areas in order to avoid encountering Communists. These familiar trade routes were convenient for most Yunnanese refugees, and Zhang Dage's description of these escape routes gives a concise picture that accords with those of other informants (see chapter 2 in this volume; also Chang 1999, 21–49, 92–127; 2006a).

Zhang Dage's family moved several times within Burma. In 1978, an uncle took him to northern Thailand for schooling by following a Yunnanese caravan escorted by a troop of the KMT Third Army. In Thailand he was reunited with his father, a minor officer of the Third Army who had been dispatched to Thailand four years earlier. His other family members made the journey a few years later. Zhang Dage completed a Chinese education at the junior high school established by the KMT Third Army in Xincun, and in 1980 he went to Taiwan for further education.[4] He later

4. From 1971 to 1991, the Free China Relief Association, a semiofficial organization that worked closely with the Nationalist government in Taiwan, offered full scholarships to Yunnanese students of northern Thailand (from fifty to one hundred annually) to travel to Taiwan for further education.

graduated from a medical college, became a physician, and married a Taiwanese woman. They have three children.

Despite my Taiwanese background, I share the same family name with Zhang Dage[5] and have been affably treated as one with the same genealogy (*tong jiamen*). From 1997 to 1999, while I was writing my doctoral dissertation in Belgium, we corresponded through letters. His narration weaves nostalgia for the past with prospects for the future and a consciousness for maintaining a record of contemporary Yunnanese migration history. The letter quoted above especially expresses his earnest desire to learn about the flight experiences of his parents' generation and to establish a historical site that will carry their memory into the next generation.

Zhang Dage once set up a weblog and is now operating a Facebook page for information sharing and networking among migrant Yunnanese—a space for remembering common experiences. He also collects resources pertaining to the history of the KMT and Yunnanese migrants in Burma and Thailand that include reports, films, maps, novels, and biographies. All demonstrate his rootedness as a Yunnanese migrant, or what Basch et al. refer to as a "transmigrant" (1994, 7), predicated on maintaining a range of social connections between one's home society and the society of settlement. A central question arises: Where is home for Zhang Dage following his parents' and his continuous migrations? Is it Shan State where he was born and lived for sixteen years, Yunnan where his parents originated and his eldest sister still lives,[6] northern Thailand where his parents have settled for more than thirty years and will eventually be buried, or central Taiwan where his immediate family is presently located? Although these are separate locations, they are linked by a series of displacements and emplacements experienced by Zhang Dage's family members that embody multifarious strands of meanings in his memory. Shan State in Burma, which he talks and writes about most, seems to have particular significance.

5. "Zhang" is the pinyin Romanization in transliteration, whereas "Chang" is the Wade-Giles Romanization used in Taiwan.

6. When Zhang Dage's mother escaped Yunnan, his sister was eight years old. She was too old to be carried all the way and too young to walk by herself, so she was left behind with a grandmother.

We covered many topics through the years regarding this question of "home." The following extract from another letter is in response to my inquiry about Yunnanese women's lives as he witnessed them in Shan State during the 1960s and 1970s.

Dear Wen-Chin,

. . . You must be anxious to receive a reply. I'm not too busy now and would like to answer the questions you have raised. . . .

Regarding the issue of Yunnanese women and their family life, it can be discussed from different perspectives. [In terms of family composition,] most husbands escaped Yunnan first and left their wives and young children behind. Some of the men were civilians; others were Nationalist stragglers or local defense guards. Many civilians joined the KMT guerrilla forces in Shan State after arriving in Burma. Many men went back to Yunnan a few years later and managed to take their dependents to Burma. A few who were better off settled their families in towns and cities. Most refugees settled around the military posts of the KMT troops [in rural Shan State] and engaged in farming. The lives of soldiers' wives were particularly hard. They had to sustain their families alone in the face of repeated battles. However, living within the power sphere of the KMT could at least guarantee protection against invasion by the Burmese army and other ethnic forces. Moreover, the KMT posts also functioned as nodes for trade caravans, and villagers could benefit from the trade. Life in Burma at that time was much better than it was in China, which was embattled by endless class struggles and a series of political movements. . . .

Most Yunnanese women in Burma spent a great deal of their time cooking, washing, taking care of their children, and raising a few pigs. In addition, they had to cultivate gardens [*zhong yuanzi*] and farms [*zhong di*]. The vegetables grown in gardens [next to their houses] were mostly for family use, but the produce planted on farms, including rice and opium, was largely for sale. Women were very busy throughout the whole year because they had to do everything themselves, including making clothes, pickled vegetables [*yancai*], soybean curd [*doufu*], sausage [*changzi*], ham [*huotui*], fermented soybeans [*douchi*], *zongzi*, and *baba*.[7] They observed every festival with special prepared food. Festivals enrich life in Burma with beautiful memories

7. *Zongzi* are glutinous rice dumplings prepared especially for the Duanwu Festival during the fifth month of the lunar calendar. *Baba* are rice cakes, made especially for the Moon Festival in the eighth month of the lunar calendar and Chinese New Year.

of childhood [for the second generation]. Regarding the future, there was no particular plan. The essential concern [for women] was the maintenance of everyday life and the safety of their husbands and children. . . .

. . . My biggest wish is that after Burma joins the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations], its political situation will improve with the gradual growth of democracy and freedom, and that ethnic rebels will disarm. I dream of returning to my birthplace someday. It would be a great joy to walk again on those familiar paths that have sustained the footprints of many souls who preceded us in this foreign land.

Best wishes,

Zhang Dage *April 25, 1997, Tainan*

In our correspondence and conversations, Zhang Dage often tells stories about the village life of his childhood in upper Burma. His narratives contrast with the memories of wars and fighting of the first generation, especially during the 1950s (see Chang 1999, 21–50). For him and many second-generation migrants who moved away later on, there is a sense of attachment to Burma, as over time memories of childhood and adolescence become nostalgic. Even today, Zhang Dage keeps transcripts of his scholastic records, stamps, notebooks, and postcards that he brought with him from Burma to Thailand and then to Taiwan, now invaluable treasures spanning time and place.

In line with Zhang Dage's narration, many informants also stressed how hard they tried to maintain a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives in spite of their mobility and difficult living conditions. Men were often absent because of military duties or trading activities, and women had to assume the responsibilities of everyday life. Their efforts to uphold a Yunnanese lifestyle illustrated their agency in counterbalancing external instability.[8] Scudder and Colson refer to "clinging to the familiar and changing no more than is necessary" in a strange environment as "conservative strategy" (1982, 272). Linkage with a former lifestyle entails the recovery of meaning and

8. In "Invisible Warriors" (Chang 2005), I have looked into the power relations embedded in gendered roles. By examining the life stories of three Yunnanese women migrants in northern Thailand, I discuss the manner in which these women coped with different predicaments in the past while adhering to traditional Chinese norms and values and simultaneously reinterpreting them with inner strength and creativity in their everyday life. Chapter 6 of this volume further explores the trading experiences of five Yunnanese women migrants in Burma in relation to gendered politics.

cultural continuity, which helps refugees reconstruct self-identity as well as form a basis of trust (Daniel and Knudsen 1995, 4). Daily maintenance of these efforts is typical for refugees (e.g., Daniel and Knudsen 1995; Fadiman 1998; Gold 1992; Hansen and Oliver-Smith 1982; Malkki 1995; Shami 1993) and calls for a range of strategies. Cooking native food is particularly essential. In the courageous and beautifully written autobiography *From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey*, Pascal Khoo Thwe, a student refugee from the Padaung minority in rural Shan State who had participated in the 1988 student movement for democracy, related his difficulty in adapting to the new diet and cuisine after arriving in England. Even "eating muesli with cold milk for breakfast for the first time was a shocking experience," he wrote (2002, 269). Regularly cooking native dishes became a necessary remedy to sustain his refugee life in a foreign land. Likewise, my informants commonly referred to cooking Yunnanese food as the most fundamental means for keeping up a Yunnanese lifestyle. As Zhang Dage's letter stressed, by observing traditional festivals with special food, Yunnanese refugees connected their past with the present, while transmitting Yunnanese beliefs, customs, and practices to the next generation.

Zhang Dage's Essays

Zhang Dage also wrote a series of short essays about his childhood in Burma, which he posted on a blog between 2000 and 2003. His narratives speak of the sociocultural meaning of Yunnanese family life, trade, education, and warfare in regard to ongoing movement. Here I quote from two essays that draw upon childhood memories, one dealing with a Chinese school and another about a battle.

Enlightenment of Education

After a diasporic Chinese community is founded, its first concern is transmission of Chinese culture to the next generation. This is not old-fashioned thinking, but perseverance in the face of external hardships.

When we moved to Bianliang (Figure 1–1), there was a primary school called "Bianliang Fuxing Xiaoxue" [Bianliang Revival Elementary School]. It was located on flat ground just outside the village center. The school was a straw long house divided into three rooms. The central one was

Figure 1–1. Zhang Dage's family photo taken in Bianliang between 1967 and 1968 (Courtesy of Zhang Dage)

the administrative office, and the other two were classrooms. The central office had protruding T-shaped eaves. Under the eaves, placed horizontally, appeared the name of the school. A couplet was posted vertically on its two sides. The line on the left stated: "Recover the motherland and wipe out national shame through the teaching and transmission of loyalty," and the line on the right said: "Regain and develop the nation with the cultivation of patriotic culture."[9] Inside the office, above the doorway, there were four characters—"propriety, justice, honesty and sense of shame" [*li yi lian chi*]—and on each side a verse: "With feet planted on the ground and head supporting the sky" [*ding tian li di*] on the left, and "To carry on the heritage so as to pave the way for future generations" [*ji wang kai lai*] on the right. The national flag of the Republic of China and a photo of its founding father, Sun Yat-sen, hung centered on the front wall. Posted respectively on four poles on the left side of the classroom were four characters: "loyalty" [*zhong*], "filial piety" [*xiao*], "benevolence" [*ren*], and "love" [*ai*]. Those on the right side read "trust" [*xin*], "justice" [*yi*], "peace" [*he*], and "harmony" [*ping*]. These

9. Fuguo xuechi shouchuang zhongzhen jiaoyu / xingbang tuqiang peiyang aiguowenhua.

> writings represented the great spirit of nature and the four ethical principles and eight cardinal virtues [*siwei bade*] in this rudimentary school. . . .
>
> I remember my first teacher's family name was Chang. Teacher Chang was not tall but had a stern face. An English teacher, surnamed Wu, joined the school later. Teacher Wu had an upright personality. The job in such a small school was too simple for his abilities, and he did not stay long. Before leaving, he gave me his English dictionary. I did not see him off on the day of his departure, but other students walked with him to the other side of the hill. They had prepared some dry food and boiled eggs for him. Even today, I do not understand why I did not join the other classmates to bid goodbye to Teacher Wu. Was I afraid of separation or was it simply due to my stupidity? I really do not know. Later on, the school hired Teacher Zi from a lowland town. He often told us stories about this town and inspired our curiosity about life there. Teacher Zi said that prior to his coming he had often heard about Bianliang. He traveled on a horse to our village. When approaching the village, he got off his horse and washed himself at a creek. However, after climbing over a hill, he was stunned to see our desolate village. Nevertheless, Teacher Zi stayed at the school longer than any other teacher. In the end, he moved to northern Thailand and resettled in a Yunnanese border village.

Zhang Dage was born in a village called Nanpoliang and lived there until 1967 when his father was dispatched to a KMT post, Bianliang.[10] After moving to this mountain village, Zhang Dage experienced many significant changes. One of them was attending a Chinese school. His essay quoted above reflects a strong cultural and political affiliation among the Yunnanese warrior-refugees with the KMT armies. When the guerrilla organization was disbanded in 1961, only the Third and Fifth Armies survived the disintegration. Subsequently, the Nationalist government in Taiwan ceased financial support of these two straggler armies and only sponsored intelligence work for Division 1920 headquartered in Chiang Mai Province (Thailand), which had supervised several posts in upper Burma since 1965.[11] While relocating their main forces to northern Thailand in the 1960s, General Li Wenhuan and General Duan Xiwen, the

10. The place is two to three hours' walk southeast from Mong Hsu (Maing Hsu), a place famous for its ruby mines (1990s).

11. The unit was commonly called the Intelligence Mainland Operation Bureau (*dalu gongzuochu*).

leaders of the two armies, left a small portion of their troops in Burma to facilitate the lucrative contraband trade across the border. Their major sources of income became drug trafficking, trade in jade stones, and escorting civilian caravans.

Although the interaction between the Third and Fifth Armies and Taiwan greatly diminished after the disbandment of the KMT guerrillas, and there were no more organized military actions against the Chinese Communists, anticommunism still served as the guiding ideology of the two armies, and the Republic of China on Taiwan remained the political fatherland vis-à-vis the native motherland of mainland China (Chang 2002, 2006a). These ideological beliefs were emphasized by the army leaders in the interest of community coherence, because they reminded the Yunnanese refugees in Burma of their common fate under the rule of a hostile host government and reinforced their morale in the face of harsh living conditions. By characterizing as devils the Chinese Communists who were responsible for their flight and the suffering of loved ones left behind, Yunnanese refugees perceived themselves as being on the side of justice. This political stance was further justified by their cultural affiliations and transmission of values to the next generation. In many Yunnanese villages in Shan State and the border areas of northern Thailand, Chinese education was organized by the KMT armies.

Zhang Dage's essay about the Bianliang Revival Elementary School indicates the KMT Yunnanese political identification during the Cold War period. Bianliang was a small mountain village with a population of about fifty households. Nevertheless, it was an important trading post of the KMT Third Army in Shan State, with around thirty troops stationed there. Armed caravans frequently passed through the village prior to 1973, either with transported goods such as opium from northern Shan State destined for Thailand or consumption merchandise from Thailand destined for the black market in Burma (see chapter 5). The name of the school, the national flag of the Republic of China, the photo of Sun Yat-sen, the verses and ethical values posted in a strong militaristic and nationalistic tone replicated those of schools in Taiwan. The four ethical principles (propriety, justice, honesty, and sense of shame) and the eight cardinal virtues (loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, love, trust, justice, peace, and harmony) were derived from Confucianism. Sun Yat-sen appropriated the eight cardinal virtues to enhance his philosophy of nationalism, and Chiang Kai-shek

used the four ethical principles to promote the New Life Movement in 1934 that aimed to modernize Chinese society. These Confucian values thus served as a metonym of orthodox Chinese culture. In contrast with the Chinese Communist government, which aimed to destroy Chinese culture through the Cultural Revolution, the Yunnanese refugees took on the mission of cultural transmission.

Differing from the anticommunist propaganda found in nationalistic writings in textbooks published by the KMT government prior to the 1990s for use in Taiwan and abroad among ethnic Chinese communities, Zhang Dage's essay conveys a childlike tone regarding this particular political scenario. Together with his other essays, his reminiscences form a record of a precious social history for the Yunnanese refugees. His description of the things and people of his childhood suspends moral judgments inherent in discussions of contraband trade and political ideology. In spite of poverty and insecurity, it was a time of innocence for a little boy who appreciated life with his family in the mountainous Shan State. Apart from political affiliation, Chinese education was predicated on people's cultural attachment. Other informants have indicated that in areas where there were no Chinese schools, some parents hired private teachers to provide Chinese education for their children. This desire to transmit Chinese culture and identity to their offspring demonstrates this migrant community's determination to maintain their roots and counterbalance the external instability of living in a foreign land.

With reference to Tsing's analysis of the Meratus Dayaks' interconnections with a series of external forces (2005), Bianliang, with its confluence of multifarious elements generated from local, national, and transnational domains, involves political, cultural, and economic implications. Much like Tsing's interpretation, the frictions that arose from the interacting process, while it produced coercion and confinements, also yielded possibilities for alignment and cooperation that stimulated villagers' agency to respond. The above essay attests to their efforts to sustain their political and cultural identification via Chinese education, a prevailing strategy among Yunnanese refugees in Burma (and also Thailand). The following essay addresses a less routine aspect of life—a military conflict. Despite its intensity, in the eyes of Zhang Dage as a small boy, it brought unique excitement to the dullness of everyday life.

War

In the mountainous regions of northern Burma, military conflicts occurred incessantly.

In the third spring of our settlement in Bianliang [i.e., 1970], apprehensive rumors circulated. Adults appeared anxious. Father frequently went to Grandpa Luo's house to attend meetings.[12] An atmosphere of agitation seemed to permeate the whole valley.

A telegram arrived. It said that the Communist Party of Burma [CPB] was moving through the mountains north of Bianliang. They were bullying civilians with increasing threats. Negotiations were to no avail. A war was imminent. More troops were dispatched to Bianliang, and more supplies and weapons arrived. Military tactics were drawn up based on sand table exercises. Our troops had completed all preparations and were waiting for deployment.

The village was filled with the noise of troops and the neighing of war horses. In our house, soldiers filled the spare rooms and corridor. They polished their weapons with great enthusiasm. Mother, however, looked distressed.

In the early morning of the day of departure, Father wore a military uniform, looking dignified and unfamiliar. Uncle Zhang walked from his home, also fully armed and equipped. The whole military group set off north from the village. All the villagers were present to send off the troops and pray for their safe and victorious return. The atmosphere was intense. My attention was particularly drawn to a mule that was loaded with a pile of cotton cloth and a first-aid kit.

After the troops had set off from the village, Grandpa got a horse and rode with me to the top of a hill. He said we were going to watch the battle. I don't know whether Grandpa was concerned for Father's safety or simply curious, but I will never forget the view. In the far distance there was a large plain where I saw many farms, spires, houses raised on stilts, and smoke from kitchen fires. This place was Mong Zhang [northwest of Bianliang, about three hours' walk from there]; it was the main battlefield. The noise of the cannons resembled thunder, and gunshots were similar to the sound of firecrackers.

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12. Grandpa Luo, the commander of the troop stationed in Bianliang, was only a few years older than Zhang Dage's father, but because of his higher official rank and according to Yunnanese custom, he was addressed as if he were a generation senior to his actual age.

> Three days later, good news arrived. The enemy had surrendered, and our troops were returning victorious. All the villagers appeared to welcome their return. Soldiers told of their heroic deeds again and again. The troops returned to their respective battalions to receive awards.
>
> A vast array of booty was displayed in the corridors of Grandpa Luo's house, including captured arms, leaflets for surrender, and printed pictures of Mao Zedong. The display was photographed. Some of the weapons were no longer of any use. Grandpa Luo gave this order: "You may use them as toys." We kids were exhilarated and fought to grab our favorite pieces. Everyone had a weapon. We launched our own fight over a local hill with incessant screams until evening when we lay down exhausted on the ground.
>
> I remember there was a girl, the only one among the group. She was a tomboy and liked to play with the boys. She carried the only automatic rifle on her shoulder that day. Her distinctive appearance eclipsed the rest of the group. Years later she went to Taiwan for further education at a business junior college. It is funny to think back to the old days. The memories of childhood are sweet despite the vicissitudes of human affairs.

Contrasting the adult war with the children's mock battle makes an interesting juxtaposition. The story intertwines excitement with a sense of anxiety and highlights both instability and absurdity in the refugees' lives. It does not address the intricacies of the hostilities or the justification for going to war, as the author's intent is not to convince anyone or any political entity, but to share his nostalgia with his blog readers, mostly fellow Yunnanese migrants who came from Burma and Thailand to Taiwan. Given its focus on the villagers' reactions, Zhang Dage's narration brings the reader directly into the people's experience and simultaneously triggers their memories of similar experiences. The language tempo is succinct and fluid, resembling the script of a short film, and vividly portrays a process connected by five major scenes—the preparation for imminent war, the villagers sending off the troops, watching the war from the top of a hill, the return of the troops, and the children's mock battle.

Fighting was incessant at the time, and victory was only ever temporary. The expansion of the CPB as well as the increasing presence of the Burmese forces compelled the KMT soldiers and their dependents in Bianliang to withdraw to Mong Zhang in 1973. Very soon the troops retreated again from Mong Zhang to Piang Luang, a border post in northern Thailand, and their dependents gradually dispersed to different places. Zhang

Dage and his family then moved to Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State. During this period, many Yunnanese refugees in rural Shan and Kachin States also migrated to towns and cities in order to avoid the constant warfare. Slowly, they established their communities in many major towns and cities in upper Burma such as Muse, Namkham, Kutkai, Lashio, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Tangyan, Taunggyi, Kengtung, Mandalay, Pyin U Lwin (Maymyo), Mogaung, and Myitkyina. Simultaneously, their economic influence became entrenched in its connection with the underground Burma–Thailand cross-border trade.

Zhang Dage's stories provide an insider's viewpoint that reveals refugees' dynamism as they reconstructed their lives in Burma. This dynamism not only inspired strategies for survival in different life domains, such as cuisine, education, economic engagement, and military action, but also created a new identity: anticommunist Chinese refugees in a foreign land who linked their past with the present and provided an outlook for the future through cultural continuity.

Zhang Dage's essays are primarily about his childhood in the rural areas, and his writing is distinctive and full of graphic images. He once explained this feature to me: "These images didn't appear suddenly but had been in my mind for a long time before I put pen to paper and wrote down the stories about them. It is like artists whose works are stimulated by inspiration. Prior to the flash of inspiration, these artists have actually been thinking for a long time." Zhang Dage's explanation indicates his artistic talent as a writer and also points to his conscious identification with his childhood in Shan State.

In addition, Zhang Dage's language communicates a strong sense of nostalgia that depicts a simple and joyful life. His other essays about this period are entitled "Life," "House Moving," "A Small Red Mule," "Mountain Spring," "Chicken Mushrooms," "Dream," "Mule Caravans," and "Li Dashu." By reconstructing memories of the beautiful old days, Zhang Dage acknowledged that his childhood in Nanpoliang and Bianliang often occurs to him, whether in thoughts or dreams, unlike memories of his later life in Taunggyi, Lashio, and northern Thailand. He said: "It was a kind of retroversion due to the pressures of studies and later on career development [in Taiwan]. For me, the time spent in Nanpoliang and Bianliang forms the roots of my life; times in Taunggyi and Lashio only form a part of the branches. The earliest stage was the hardest, but is also the most

precious. People need roots. It is very sad if one doesn't have his or her own roots."

Through writing Zhang Dage crafts his longing for an enrooted childhood memory of rural Shan State. His essays reveal a strong desire to retain the past, which, however, is grounded on the awareness that the past will never return, and in any case, he cannot revisit these places, as the area is closed to foreigners. Life to him is a series of travels; after adapting to an environment, he often had to move to a new one. Consequently, he holds on to the memory of a happy childhood that gives him a feeling of rootedness in order to overcome the feeling of displacement.

In Taunggyi and Lashio (1974–1978)

Prior to the KMT troop's move from Mong Zhang to northern Thailand in 1974, Zhang Dage's father asked a cousin living in Taunggyi to take in Zhang Dage so he could study in that city. At the same time, a neighbor, Uncle Chen, contacted his brother in Taunggyi to take in his son, Xiaowei. Zhang Dage's uncle and Xiaowei's uncle both agreed. It was about a year later when Zhang Dage's mother, sister, and brother joined him there. On the afternoon of August 25, 2008, at his home in Taichung, Taiwan, Zhang Dage told me about some aspects of this transition.

"We rode horses from Mong Zhang and stayed one or two nights on the way. We crossed the bridge in Kunhing and arrived at a public road. We then transferred to a jeep. It was my first time sitting in a car. I was small and felt the car running very fast. I felt dizzy and didn't know which direction I should look. I turned to the left, to the right, and to the rear. But it was very scary looking to the rear and seeing the road moving so fast. If you are used to sitting in a car from a young age, you cannot imagine that feeling. You would say sitting in a car was just a simple matter, but it was not so in my case. My uncle noticed my discomfort and told me to look at the mirror at the front of the car. It helped. I felt more stable.

"The car reached Taunggyi. The house of Xiaowei's uncle was on the main road, *lanma*, and they alighted first. When the car took off again, my uncle said to me: 'Remember well where Uncle Chen's house is.' Attentively, I tried to remember every turn. But the roads were very different from those in our village, and the houses were different too. After two

turns I had lost my orientation. When the car arrived at my uncle's house, I put down my luggage and began to miss Xiaowei. We came from the same village, and he was the only friend I had in Taunggyi. I immediately went to look for his uncle's house. But after two turns, I had lost my way. I cannot remember how I managed to find his uncle's house that day.

"My uncle registered me in the first grade at a Burmese school, and I started Burmese lessons. Before going to Taunggyi, I couldn't speak a word of Burmese. My uncle told the landlord's twin sons: 'You teach Jiayao Burmese; he will teach you Chinese.' My uncle taught me one Burmese sentence—'Daba khawlei? Zheshi sheme?' [What is this?] Whatever I saw, I pointed to that object and asked the twins: 'Daba khawlei? Daba khawlei?' I thus learned my Burmese from them. One of the twins was named Gugu and the other Bobo. By the time a month had passed, we had no difficulty communicating.

"Before going to Taunggyi, I had studied at the Bianliang primary school for nearly four years. The difference between these two schools was primarily the language used in teaching. Except for the class on the Burmese language, I had already studied the other subjects in Bianliang. I therefore scored the highest grades in the class. My class teacher seldom let me stay in class. She often assigned me errands such as going to the post office, buying things, or paying bills. She must have thought that I had studied those subjects before anyway, and that I was trustworthy and capable.

"I worked hard on the Burmese language because I refused to fall behind the other students. But maybe due to a Han chauvinist mentality which had been instilled in me by my grandpa and the teachers in Bianliang, I felt the Burmans were a less developed people and the Burmese language a less developed language. A year later, I asked my mother, who had just arrived in Taunggyi, to send me to a Chinese school in Lashio [the capital of northern Shan State]. She thought I was still too young and refused. I then asked my uncle repeatedly for the same thing. Finally he agreed to take me to Lashio. At that time I had yet to finish my second year at the Taunggyi primary school.

"We went by airplane, my first flight. My uncle gave me many first-time experiences. After arriving in Lashio, I was placed directly in Guowen Chinese School [*guowen zhongxue*] at the junior high level because of my age. My uncle took me to class on the first day. I was the shortest in the class and was thus assigned to sit in the first row. After I sat down, my uncle said

to the class: 'This is Zhang Jiayao. He is from Taunggyi. You have to take care of him; he is still small.' After the introduction, he returned to Taunggyi and left me alone in Lashio.

"I stayed at the school dormitory with students of different ages. The older ones took care of the younger ones. Some kids still wet their beds. The beds were made of bamboo and were placed at two levels, one higher and one lower. The sides of these beds did not have railings, and students frequently fell onto the ground while asleep. Those who slept on the lower-level beds often found their heads covered with white powder in the morning. It was from the upper-level beds, where worms were eating the wood.

"At Guowen, the happiest hour was after school. The older students took the younger ones to the river. We wrapped our dirty clothes in a bundle with a piece of *longyi*.[13] We washed the clothes and dried them on the grass by the riverbank. We swam for one or two hours and then picked up the dried clothes and went back to the dormitory. Occasionally, we went out for a movie or wandered around the town. I spoke Burmese when we were out, but basically, my life in Lashio was a return to the familiarity of Han community life. The Han population in Lashio was much larger than in Taunggyi."

Leaving the mountains for Taunggyi and later Lashio was transformative for Zhang Dage. It was a leap from rural to urban and from contact with other ethnic minorities to encounters with the ethnic majority, the Burmans, and their culture. In Tsing's words, it was a process of "encounters across differences" (2005). While adapting to a much more advanced lifestyle in a material sense, he was also aware of different ethnic politics. In the mountain villages, in association with the KMT troops, the Yunnanese Chinese were politically predominant and economically more resourceful. Although fighting with ethnic-based armies or the CPB sometimes occurred, basically they governed their own areas and led their own way of life. But in the lowlands, all the official agencies were controlled by the Burmans. When Zhang Dage had to attend the Burmese school and learn the Burmese language, he was aware of the shift from being in a ruling group to a ruled group. As told in the story, before long his ethnic pride propelled him to go to Lashio for a Chinese education. He was there for

13. *Longyi* is a sarong-like skirt commonly worn by both men and women in Burma.

only one and a half years before making another leap to Thailand and later on to Taiwan to pursue grander opportunities.

While Zhang Dage was in Lashio, one individual influenced his decision to go to Thailand and then Taiwan. This was an outstanding student who had graduated from Guowen Chinese School several years before Zhang Dage's arrival. That student received a scholarship from Taiwan and went there for further education. While he was studying at a medical college, he published a magazine critical of the Burmese government. This angered the government and made the student a hero to the Chinese community, especially the teachers and students at Guowen. "Our teacher told us that that graduate was our model. I thus decided to go to Taiwan. At that time my father was in northern Thailand. It was easier to go to Taiwan via Thailand. So I decided to go to Thailand first."

Going to Thailand (1978)

Zhang Dage returned to Taunggyi and waited for two months until there were vehicles going to Kengtung. They were government trucks that transported supplies to the border areas for the Burmese troops and, at the same time, also secretly served as a means of transportation for civilians. The fees collected from the passengers provided extra income for the drivers. These trucks were blue and rounded in the front, and were called *lantouche* by the Yunnanese. Several informants said that they were bull-nosed Hino trucks that Japan donated as a part of postwar compensation for its atrocities in Burma during the Second World War.

Zhang Dage left Taunggyi with Uncle Chu,[14] a fictive relative who was going to Thailand for business. They were among several hundred passengers in a caravan of more than forty trucks. They gathered at Hopong, a village outside Taunggyi, before setting off on the journey.

"The sight of the cars going around the mountains was spectacular. While our truck was on this side of a mountain, I could see other cars on the opposite side of another mountain. Unfortunately, the trucks were stopped

14. Uncle Chu was married to a woman from a Zhang family. Though his wife is not genealogically related to Zhang Dage's family, because they shared the same family name Uncle Chu was considered kin by affiliation.

at a checkpoint before reaching Loilin [ninety-two kilometers from Taunggyi]. All the passengers were chased out of the trucks and forbidden to go any farther. I understood Burmese and remember a military officer shouting to the crowd: 'What do you Chinese intend to do? Why are you all going to the border? Are you going to subvert the government?' The passengers had to look for their own transport. Some people decided to return to Taunggyi by hiring tractors, but most of them decided to go to Loilin and see what could be done the next day. It was already dark as we walked toward Loilin dragging our luggage. We were like a swarm of fleeing refugees, distressed and dirty. When we arrived in Loilin, we went to a school. We put aside the desks and chairs in a classroom and made our beds on the floor. Uncle Chu said to me: 'We sleep here tonight. Do not be afraid.'

"After lying down, I put my hand into the pocket of my shorts to check on the money I had carried. I couldn't find my money. I panicked. I had carried eleven hundred kyat. That was several years' savings from my family. I must have dropped it on the way while walking to Loilin. I ran outside to look for the money, but was stopped by a soldier. '*Dikaung* [kid], where are you going?' Many Burmese soldiers were on guard outside the school. I replied: 'I've lost my money. I'm going to look for it.' He said: 'Where on earth are you going to find it? You can't find it. Wait till tomorrow morning.' But I didn't listen to him and kept running. I searched the ground with my flashlight. I came upon a small package wrapped in cotton paper. I grabbed it and felt the weight. I didn't know what it was, but thrust it into my pocket. I ran forward and found another similar package. I thrust it into my pocket too. Do you know what I had found? Sixteen pieces of old silver Chinese coins [*laoyinyuan*]. It was a lot of money. I didn't know what to do with them. If I was found in possession of these illegal coins, I would be put in jail. I walked back to the school and threw the two packages under a green hedge; I was afraid the Burmese soldiers would search us during the night. I prayed that I would be able to find the coins the next morning.

"I couldn't sleep the whole night. I was troubled by many thoughts. I had lost my own money but found those illegal coins. And I didn't know if I would be able to make my trip to Thailand. Around six o'clock in the morning, I got up and went to look for the money. It was foggy. I pretended that I was going to urinate. I walked to that hedge and put my hand underneath to search. The two packages were still there. I put them

in my pocket and went back to the classroom. I then told Uncle Chu about the loss of my money and about finding the coins. Uncle Chu said to me: 'I know someone in Loilin. His name is Cao Dapeng. We will go to the station to ask his whereabouts.'

"We went to the station and told a *saikka* [trishaw] driver to take us to Cao Dapeng's house. Uncle Cao was startled to see us. His house was very shabby and had nothing in it. He went to the chicken coop in the backyard and got two eggs. I spotted his nervous looks to his wife, expressing his embarrassment over their poverty. After the meal, we hired a tractor and went to Pinlong.[15] We stayed in Pinlong for two days and then went to Xunding [a Shan village that was three to four hours on foot from Pinlong].[16] We waited for a period of *sangai* [three rotating markets] before setting off from Xunding to Thailand with a caravan.[17]

"I met Uncle Zhang Han in Xunding. His house had been next to ours in Bianliang. He and his troops were stationed in Xunding. He was very happy to see me and asked a soldier-messenger to take me every day to his office. He would chat with me while lying in bed, smoking opium. In addition, the family of that soldier-messenger lived in Reshuitang Xincun, the village that I was traveling to in northern Thailand. After learning of my destination, he was very nice to me. Generally speaking, I was very happy in Xunding, except in my dealings with our landlady, who was a snob. It was a Yunnanese custom to accept requests for accommodation from fellow travelers. However, the terms of payment were not discussed at the beginning. Sometimes when I stayed in the kitchen to help the landlady prepare meals, she would complain acrimoniously that too many people stayed at her house. I dared not tell Uncle Chu about this, but he must have observed the landlady's coldhearted manner. When we were leaving, Uncle Chu purchased a big sack of rice and a whole preserved pig's leg. He asked a few soldiers to carry the rice and ham to the landlady's house as

15. Pinlong is the town where an agreement initiated by Bogyoke Aung San that guaranteed a union form of government and the right of secession to ethnic minorities was signed in 1947.

16. Xunding was a primary starting point of the caravans traveling to Thailand (for further information see chapters 3 and 5).

17. *Gai* was the Yunnanese pronunciation for *jie* in Mandarin, which means a marketplace. It was a tradition in Yunnan and upper mainland Southeast Asia that a market was held every five days in rural areas. *Gai* thus became a unit of time. *Sangai* referred to three units of *gai* at one place, meaning fifteen days.

gifts of our appreciation for the board and lodging. The gifts amounted to more than half a year's accommodation. This incident taught me how to treat people generously.

"We set off on our journey to Thailand with a small caravan of thirty to forty mules. I remember there were eleven escort soldiers and a commanding officer. We walked for ten days. The experience was very significant for me. Even after all these years I remember several scenes vividly. During the journey, we had to pass several rivers that flowed through valleys. The riverbanks were precipitous [*xia jiangbianpo*]. One time I saw a man carrying a big load of flip-flops with a bamboo stick, walking downward to a river. From a distance, I couldn't see the man, only a load of moving slippers. Another time I saw a man carrying a big roll of corrugated zinc plates on his back. They were for use in roof construction. I also saw another man carrying a bicycle, walking down a slope. After reaching flat ground, he rode the bicycle. That bicycle was loaded with commodities. These scenes startled me. If I had still been living in mountain villages, I may not have felt shocked. But I had been to Taunggyi and Lashio, and had the experience of traveling by airplane, train, and car. I had watched movies, and our house in Taunggyi had electricity. I had experienced civilized life and was used to buying smuggled goods transported to the cities by Hino trucks for the *hmaungkho* market [black market]. When I saw how hard these porters worked to make a living, I felt pity for them. I knew I could not do what they did. Their profits from these demanding trips were small.

"During the journey, I also saw oxen that were being herded to Thailand for sale. But some oxen die on the way because of illness or old age. When this happened, they were abandoned. It was pitiful to see oxen dying on the way. They knelt down unable to move. I walked farther and saw oxen that had just died. Swarms of flies circled around the carcasses. When approaching the Thai border, I saw whole skeletons of oxen, and farther down, scattered skeletons.

"Once we had to pass a track. We knew enemies were entrenched on the other side of the mountain, but we had to pass there, as it was the only way. The atmosphere was intense. Nobody made a sound, not even the animals. Another time, while passing a place at night, a troop emerged suddenly from behind. They had hidden themselves in dense grass. Luckily they were not enemies. After recognizing our troop, they emerged to greet us. Each time, before setting off on the next stage of the journey, our escorts had to send two soldiers ahead to check if it was safe. Every day, the distance

we walked varied. If the track condition was good, we walked a longer distance. If conditions were bad, we walked a shorter distance. When there were no villages on the way for a few days, we had to prepare extra food in advance. The knowledge of long-distance trade was obtained through the accumulated experiences of many generations. It was precious wisdom."

Zhang Dage's group arrived in Thailand safely. Despite the challenges that arose from political suppression, material scarcity, social unrest, and topographical dangers, Zhang Dage mapped out his future through mobility. While his father and uncle initiated going to Taunggyi, his later journeys to Lashio, Thailand, and then Taiwan were his own decisions. They reveal his internal drive in response to external challenges and his pursuit of a better life. Travels, in effect, bring him into contact with diverse people and environments and also cultivate his outlook as he compares different ways of living. In his narratives the reflections on the contrast between rural and urban lifestyles on the way to Thailand are particularly heartfelt and reveal his conscious forward-moving or upward path and his choice not to return to his former way of life. This longing for a better future through movement is common among migrant Yunnanese youth.

By narrating his lived experiences, Zhang Dage relates his involvement with a series of environments and events in meaningful sequence. Looking back on his life in Burma, he is conscious of complex forces that have impacted how he understands the world and himself: those originating from places, people, and things around him, and from ideologies of anticommunism and Sinocentrism. While the last two factors urged him to migrate and finally go to Taiwan, where he could discard his refugee status and be fully Chinese, the former ones have always reminded him of his identification with the Shan State of Burma and motivated him to seek connections and to write and talk about them. Through these practices he has been trying to unify the various impacts arising from his migratory life in order to assuage his state of ambivalence as a diasporan. While he values his roots and native places that live only in his constructed memory, he exerts himself to find the best in his current habitat. In Taiwan, he is a physician, a prestigious profession that has transformed his original status—from refugee to returned overseas Chinese (*guiqiao*), and from a child of an ethnic military family to an upper-middle-class elite. By crossing several national borders, he has also transcended the borders of his former social status and class. Yet, can we answer the question raised at the beginning of the chapter: Where is home for Zhang Dage?

On his former blog, Zhang Dage posted his favorite poem, entitled "Miscellaneous Poem," written by a famous Chinese poet, Tao Yuanming (365–427 CE).

> Life has no roots / Like dust floating on a footpath / Scattered by the wind without a destination / The physical body is not eternal / Having been born to this world / We are all brothers / There is no need for bloodshed / Enjoy life whenever possible / Drink with neighbors / This life will not come again / Just like a day passes by / Act now / Time never awaits you.[18]

This poem, characterized by an understanding of life's uncertainty and a carefree attitude, seemingly contrasts with Zhang Dage's craving for roots. His fondness for the poem, however, reflects his diasporic subjectivity that straddles the divide between attendant prospects and a lost feeling when traveling. It is an interstitial state of mind that commonly exists among immigrants and refugees whose lives are stranded in dislocation and exile (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; Khoo Thwe 2002; Krulfeld et al. 1999; Lorente et al. 2005; Malkki 1995; Said 1999). They continuously struggle to reconcile the friction generated by the gap between their past and present.

Again, take Khoo Thwe's flight to England as an example: although the new environment granted him physical safety after his dreadful experiences fighting the Burmese army in the jungle, he was not able to regain peace of mind. While he worked strenuously as a Cambridge University undergraduate during the day, at night he was preoccupied by his native "ghost culture." In his autobiography he wrote:

> The space between being awake and asleep, the gap between the physical and metaphysical or subliminal worlds, between East and West, were eerily interlocked in my mind. All I needed was to go to sleep and I was in another world—whether of nightmares or visions of my friends and my home in Shan State. When I woke up I was thrown back to the lonely reality of exile. I was worried about my friends and family in the wrong way, because my feelings for them were mixed up with guilt and frustration. (2002, 279)

18. Rensheng wugendi / Piaoru moshangchen / Fensan zhufengzhuan / Ciyi feichangshen / Luodi weixiongdi / Hebi qingurou / Dehuan dangzuole / Doujiu jubilin / Shengnian buzailai / Yiri nanzaichen / Jishi dangmianli / Suiyue budairen.

Although Zhang Dage has never referred to such opposing forces, he acknowledges an enduring in-between feeling that is intensified by his multiple concerns: worry for his aged parents in Thailand, missing his eldest sister in Yunnan, nostalgia for his native places in Shan State, and caring for his own family in Taiwan. These feelings have driven him to go to Thailand annually despite his busy career. In 1993 he went back to Burma to visit his uncle's family who had moved from Taunggyi to Mandalay, and in 1997 he went to Yunnan to see his ninety-four-year-old grandmother[19] and his eldest sister, and to worship at the ancestors' graves. Still, he hopes to go back to Nanpoliang and Bianliang in Shan State for a visit someday, although he knows that all Yunnanese migrants have moved away from these places. While physically he may not be able to return to his native places, like Khoo Thwe he travels there in his dreams.

19. The grandmother passed away the year after Zhang Dage's visit.