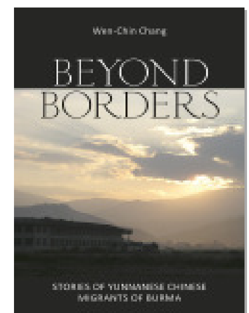
3. Pursuit of Ambition: Father and Son



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3

Pursuit of Ambition

Father and Son

> I was young and ambitious. . . . My troops and I received training at the headquarters [the KMT Third Army in northern Thailand] for one month and then returned to northern Burma to recruit more soldiers.
>
> —Mr. Li—Father, June 5, 2007

> It is hard to imagine that I, born in a mountain village in Burma, could have become a manager in a Taiwanese company.
>
> —Guoguang—Son, June 6, 2007

I met Mr. Li and his eldest son, Guoguang, during my third field trip to Taunggyi in June 2007. Zhang Dage had mentioned the father to me two years earlier. He told me that Mr. Li had been in the Ka Kwe Ye (KKY)[1] force and could tell me much of its history. Zhang Dage originally tried to arrange a meeting for me with Mr. Li in 2006 while I was conducting fieldwork in Taunggyi, but electronic communication was not convenient in Burma at that time, and when he finally got in touch with Mr. Li via one of Mr. Li's brothers who also lived in Taiwan, I had already left Taunggyi for another city. The following year, as I was planning another trip to Burma, Zhang Dage gave me Mr. Li's phone number. The day after my arrival in Taunggyi, I called Mr. Li from a shop. Luckily, he was home. I told him

1. The Ka Kwe Ye, or People's Volunteer Force, were auxiliary local defense troops officially recognized by the Burmese government between 1963 and 1973 (Smith 1993, 95). However, a former KKY officer told me that his unit was established in 1962 in northern Shan State.

briefly about myself and my wish to visit him. Strangely, he said he had not heard about me, but he invited me to visit him that morning. Not knowing Mr. Li's neighborhood well, I asked the shopkeeper (also a Yunnanese) for directions. He told me it was not easy to locate Mr. Li's house, which was some distance away, but Mr. Li's eldest son lived nearby. He suggested I go to the son first and let him take me to see his father. He then kindly sent a shop girl to take me to the son's house.

Mr. Li's eldest son and his wife ran a bookstore that also provided copy services. After I introduced myself and told him about my phone call with his father, the son immediately agreed to take me by motorcycle to see him. The father's house, located in an alley, was a medium-size two-story building with a front yard. When I arrived, Mr. Li was sitting in the yard smoking a Yunnanese water pipe (*shuiyantong*) and chatting with a friend. I greeted him, gave him a tin of cookies[2] that I had purchased in the shop earlier and my name card. He looked at the card and told his son to take me to the living room. A housemaid brought me a glass of hot tea. Many photos and certificates hanging on the walls immediately captured my attention. These certificates attested to Mr. Li's important positions in various organizations, including several local Chinese temples, Chinese schools, and two Kokang associations. Mr. Li entered the room and saw me looking at them. He smiled and invited me to sit on the sofa. I repeated again my wish to learn of his personal history. He sat down in good spirits, lit a cigarette, placed it in a water pipe, and started to smoke. Punctuated by the distinctive sound of the water pipe, he began: "Whatever you want to know, you may ask. My history is very long; not even three days and three nights could exhaust my whole story [wode gushi santian sanye ye shuo buwan]. You can write slowly. You can ask me the history of the [KMT] Third and Fifth Armies, the history of the caravan trade, the history of Shan armies. Do you know Bo Kanzurt?[3] I entered the troop at the age of fourteen or fifteen."

Mr. Li's opening was a declaration of his importance and personal involvement in the making of history in Shan State in Burma and the border areas of northern Thailand. This is an intricate history that involves various ethnic forces and state authorities beyond national borders. I was

2. Among the Yunnanese in both Burma and Thailand, it is customary on a formal visit to bring a tin of cookies for the host.

3. Bo Kanzurt was the secondary leader of the Shan United Revolutionary Army. He was in charge of the army's affairs in Xunding, while the founder of the army, Bo Moherng, camped with another section of the troops in Piang Luang, a border village in northern Thailand.

impressed by his openness and pondered how to begin my inquiries. I was familiar with the common description of one's history as "very long," with a narration that would extend "beyond three days and three nights." While pointing to the richness of one's life history, simultaneously the informant can also mean "my story is too long to tell." Experience had taught me that unless I built a base of trust and familiarity with my interviewees, it would be difficult to gain insight into their lives. A link with a person's close relatives is always good preparation, but I was not sure what had gone wrong with the earlier connection via Mr. Li's brother.

What I was more interested in getting Mr. Li to tell me was the concrete social history of the past, rather than a general description of leadership in different ethnic insurgent groups. To avoid sensitive questions right away, I started to ask Mr. Li about his family history.

"When did you come to Burma?"

"It wasn't me. It was a very long time ago. At the end of the Ming dynasty, a son-in-law of the emperor, from a family named Chen, took troops to Kokang. There have been seventeen generations in my clan since the immigration. The troops first arrived in a place in Kokang named Shangliuhu [area of upper six households]. My great-grandfather moved the family to another place, named Alapi [also in Kokang]. My grandfather and grandmother moved again to Changqingshan [mountain of evergreen, which is next to Kokang across the Salween River]. My father was born there; I was born there too, in 1943. Changqingshan is a big mountain. There were many villages, forty to fifty of them. Ours was called Dashuitang [big water pond].[4] My father was a division chief [*quzhang*]. Our ancestor originated from Nanjing Yingtianfu. My wife's ancestor was also from Nanjing. He was dispatched to a military station in Zhenkang. The clan of my wife had been there for many generations. Her family fled Zhenkang to Kokang in 1958."

"Do you have a clan genealogy book?"

"No."

"Are Kokangs and Yunnanese the same?"

"The speech is the same. We speak the same dialect as the people of Zhenkang and Gengma [in Yunnan]. But we are Kokangs. There are in total eight hundred thousand to nine hundred thousand Kokangs [spread

4. Another place also named Dashuitang is located inside Kokang.

in different places] in Burma.[5] There is an Ethnic Kokang Cultural Association [*guogan minzu wenhuahui*]. The current association president, Luo Xinghan, is seventy-three and the richest person among the Kokang. I'm the first vice president of the association, in charge of the affairs of Kengtung and Taunggyi Districts."

Mr. Li's narration is drawn from different sources, mingled with popular social history. Kokang, a primarily ethnic-Chinese-inhabited area, is located in the far northeastern corner of Shan State, bordering China's Yunnan Province. Across the border on its east are Zhenkang and Gengma. Its western border reaches the Salween River and its southern border the Namtim River. It is a mountainous region, famous for the production of high-quality opium. The total geographical area is about fifty-one hundred square kilometers (Cai 1989, 1; Luo 2006, 19). Local people tend to attribute the origin of their ancestral migration to the flight of the last Southern Ming emperor, Yongli (also commonly known as Gui Wang),[6] to Burma in 1659. The emperor was captured in Mandalay in 1662, then delivered to Kunming and executed there by strangulation (Shore 1976; Thant Myint-U 2006, 84–87; Yu 2000, 89–112). Some of the loyalists and troops accompanying him were said to have escaped to Kokang, where they settled.[7] Despite the historical fact of Yongli's flight to Burma, there is no record that verifies its Kokang origin.[8] Throughout history, the region has been under the sphere of influence of different political entities—China, Great Britain, and Burma.[9] However, its remoteness and rugged terrain have

5. The number seems to be exaggerated. According to Kokang Cultural Association in Lashio, there are about three hundred thousand Kokangs in Burma—four thousand to five thousand in Mandalay, fifty thousand in Lashio, more than one hundred thousand in Kokang, and the rest dispersed to other places in upper Burma and Yangon. Many Yunnanese migrants who hold a Kokang identification card are actually arrivals to Burma after 1949; they are from a range of places in Yunnan.

6. Yongli was the emperor's era name. His original name was Zhu Youlang, and he was commonly referred to as Gui Wang (Prince Gui), although historically he was never entitled to this position (Shore 1976, 249). I am indebted to Sun Laichen for the reference.

7. Research on Kokang is meager. A few major works are by Cai (1989), Kratoska (2002), Sai Kham Mong (2005), and Yang (1997). Historians have disputed the resettlement of the surviving loyalists and troops of Zhu Youlang in Burma; see Nin (1987).

8. I am indebted again to Sun Laichen's confirmation of the lack of historical records regarding this question.

9. Kokang (or Guogan), called Maliba in earlier times, was incorporated into Chinese territory in the early Ming period, under the administrative supervision of the native official (*tusi*) of Meng Gen. Later on, control switched to the native official of Mu Bang. In 1897, the British extended their colonial rule to Kokang. Following the independence of the Union of Burma in 1948,

guaranteed its de facto autonomy and the people's self-identity as Kokangs (*guoganren*), or people of Maliba in earlier times (*malibaren*). Nevertheless, the region is not completely isolated. Because of its geographical location, for centuries many artisans and laborers from nearby areas of Yunnan arrived every year to take miscellaneous jobs during the dry season and returned home before the advent of the rainy season (Cai 1989, 37). Following the Communist takeover in China in 1949, many Yunnanese refugees fled to this essentially Chinese-inhabited region.

Apart from connecting his ancestor's arrival in Kokang with the last Ming emperor, Mr. Li's placing his and his wife's ancestry in Nanjing prior to migration to Yunnan and Kokang is also derived from a popular social memory that stresses Han Chinese origins. Yunnan (and also Kokang) was originally inhabited by non-Han ethnic groups. As mentioned in the introduction, beginning with the Ming dynasty, massive Chinese resettlement in Yunnan was carried out to consolidate the central government's rule in this frontier area. The Han influx was accompanied by Chinese colonial rule. The rhetoric of imperial historiography highlighting Sinocentrism underlines the official records (Wade 2000), and in practice the Chinese expansion in Yunnan through "successive stages of conquest, occupation and assimilation" (FitzGerald 1972, 77) has essentially been remembered by the Han population as civilizing (*jiaohua*) native barbarians (Chang 2006a, 67). Accordingly, only by attributing one's ancestral emigration as being from China proper can one justify his or her Han identity. As the founding capital of the Ming dynasty, Nanjing has historical significance. Large numbers of Ming troops gathered here before they set off to Yunnan for military occupation.[10] Moreover, since Emperor Yongli fled from Nanjing to Burma, Nanjing is often appropriated as one's original ancestral locality, especially among those clans that did not pass on a genealogical book.

Mr. Li went on to tell me the function of the Ethnic Kokang Cultural Association, which was founded in 1976 in Lashio. He referred to it as a legal institute that helps mediate all kinds of disputes among fellow Kokangs. It even has the authority to grant divorce and to mete out punishments to

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Kokang became a constituent part of Shan State. The Kokang were recognized as an ethnic group later and granted citizenship (Cai 1989, 10–19; Chen 1996, 180; Kratoska 2002). Until 1965, the place was under the rule of the Yang family, which had established its control around 1880 (Cai 1989, 25).

10. However, most of the troops were recruited from neighboring provinces in the Yangtze delta area (Chang 2006a).

drug addicts and criminals. In a nutshell, it is a very powerful organization among the Kokang, with branch offices located in various places.

"Whatever you want to ask, you may ask," Mr. Li repeated again. I was encouraged and suggested he tell me about his youth. I wanted to learn more of his personal story. He said: "We [he and his group of friends] went to a local school in [Changqingshan] for two years, and then transferred to another Chinese school in Lashio. We were older than the other students of the same grade, so we jumped to the fourth grade. I was eleven years old at that time. I studied in Lashio until I finished junior high in 1961. In Lashio, I went to Zhong Hua School. We had to practice Chinese calligraphy and keep a diary every day. Our teachers and textbooks were all from Taiwan.[11] Ideologically, we affiliated with the right wing [the Chinese Nationalist government]. Another school—Zhong Shan School—belonged to the left wing [that identified with the Chinese Communists]."

"How were the textbooks transported from Taiwan?"

"Possibly they were transported to Yangon and then distributed to different places inside the country.[12] The left-wing Zhong Shan School used Nanyang textbooks from Malaysia. They had three hundred to four hundred students; we had more than six hundred students. The students of the two schools often got into fights. Sometimes I took out my gun and fired a shot in the air. That scared those Zhong Shan students and they ran away. My father was a division chief in Changqingshan, so he had guns. After graduation in 1961, I went to join the [KMT] Third Army, which had just retreated to Thailand from Shan State in Burma. At that time, Chiang Kai-shek was the president [in Taiwan]; Chiang Ching-kuo was the minister of national defense;[13] Chen Cheng was the vice president. The

11. The school may have had connections with Taiwan, but it was quite impossible that the teachers were sent from there. During the Cold War period, there were intelligence agents working in upper Burma for the Taiwanese government, but most of these agents were local Yunnanese.

12. Another informant said that Chinese books from Taiwan were banned, as Burma did not recognize the KMT government in Taiwan. However, prior to 1965 many textbooks from there were transported to Yangon via Hong Kong by sea. In Hong Kong, a new cover was added to these books that changed the place of publication to Hong Kong. Other sources were Chinese textbooks published in Singapore and shipped from there to Yangon. After the ban on Chinese education in Burma in 1965, the government forbade the entry of Chinese textbooks. The mule caravans from northern Thailand then smuggled a small number of Chinese textbooks to Shan State. Most Chinese schools, now underground, also printed their own textbooks using steel plates.

13. Chiang Ching-kuo was the eldest son of Chiang Kai-shek. He became the minister of national defense in 1965.

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Third Army had its registration number in Taiwan. I was appointed the commanding officer of the Second Independent Regiment [*duli diertuan tuanzhang*]. I left the Third Army and returned to Burma in 1968 to lead a Ka Kwe Ye troop in Changqingshan of more than three hundred soldiers. I led the troop until 1973."

By connecting his personal experience with group and national history, Mr. Li seemingly tried to emphasize his significance. As I grew more interested in the details of his military career, his recounting, however, became sketchy. He quickly changed the subject and referred briefly to his movement from one place to another as a civilian businessman after 1973. Though a civilian, he stressed his leadership among the Kokang and his contribution to the community, without giving much explanation. Maybe he was tired; maybe he was cautious about revealing too many details. I sensed it was time to end my visit. Before leaving, I asked him if I could come the next day to learn more of his story. He said I was welcome. I was pleased with the answer and told him I would go to his eldest son's house next morning by nine o'clock and let his son take me to his house again. With this arrangement in place, the eldest son, Guoguang, sent me back to my place.

The next morning I arrived at Guoguang's small two-story wooden house. The front part of the first floor was a bookstore, and Guoguang was sitting there smoking a cigarette. He invited me to come in and gestured to me to sit on a wooden chair. A maid brought me a glass of hot tea. While waiting for him to finish smoking, I started to chat with him. Guoguang was born in 1966 in Dashuitang village in Changqingshan. He has two younger sisters and three younger brothers, all married except the youngest brother. Guoguang's family moved to the present house only a year ago. Guoguang and his wife, a teacher at a Chinese school, have two children. They first stayed with his parents, but two years ago they moved out to open a Chinese restaurant. The business was poor, however, and he closed the restaurant and moved to the present house to start a bookshop. The shop sold and rented out novels, magazines, and cartoon books, many of them from Taiwan. Most of the time, the shop was looked after by a Shan girl. Guoguang said he also brokered jade stones from time to time for buyers from China and Taiwan who are mostly acquaintances through business connections. When they came, he would take them to see jade stones and help in price negotiations. To my surprise, he suddenly told me that a year ago, his uncle in Taiwan had contacted the family about my

coming. "So," I thought, "the family has known about me for a year." I pondered this in my mind.

"I have been to Taiwan. I was there for many years," he said slowly. He lit another cigarette and continued smoking. I sensed he had something to tell me, but I was also a bit anxious about the appointment with his father. I kept quiet and waited to hear what he was going to say. I ended up sitting in Guoguang's shop for the next three hours completely absorbed by his story and struck by his eloquence. I raised very few questions and tried to write down everything I heard in my notebook. Guoguang narrated his story structurally, mapping out his account progressively through time and space. His voice was low and his tone quiet. It seemed the story had been growing inside him for a long time, and finally he gave birth to it by telling it to a stranger, a stranger he had heard about a year before, a stranger who was researching the history of Yunnanese migrants in Burma and Thailand and possibly would publish it.

As Guoguang neared the end of his tale, his father appeared. He had come to check on why I had not shown up and found me sitting in the shop taking notes of his son's story. I felt a bit awkward. He did not say anything but gave a few nods. I was not sure what his nodding meant. I apologized to him and said I would visit him the next morning. He agreed and then left. Guoguang seemed undisturbed by his father's arrival, and after his father left, he carried on relating his story. Around half past twelve, his wife, Chunmei, came home from school. She is from Taiwan, where they had met and gotten married. It is unusual for a Taiwanese lady to follow her husband back to Burma. I had lunch with them that noon.

The following week, I visited Guoguang and his wife several times. I checked with Guoguang on some parts of his story and learned from Chunmei about the family's interaction with her father-in-law. "He still lives in the past," Chunmei said to me. "The whole family disagrees with his way of doing things. Most of his children live in separate places, but he has not divided the family property yet. He still thinks of buying a big piece of land in Taunggyi and having all his sons build their houses next to each other on the land."

That week, I also visited Mr. Li three more times on my own. Apart from relating his life story to me, he and one of his friends took me to visit three local Chinese temples, the Taunggyi branch of the Ethnic Kokang Cultural Association, and two Chinese schools. Ostensibly he was giving me a tour of Taunggyi; in reality, he was demonstrating his wide social

connections. "I have cared for my people my whole life. I have suffered a great deal. I do not aim for money but for name,"[14] he stressed while we were visiting the Ethnic Kokang Cultural Association. He told me details about his military life that reflect a precious part of the social history of Shan State since the 1960s. The "incident" when he saw me interviewing his son seemed to have generated a positive push. I sensed that there was a slight tension between father and son and that perhaps Mr. Li was competing with his son in narrating his story to me. During our interviews, he hinted a few times that he was more experienced than his son.

From my perspective, both the father and son told wonderful stories, illustrating their movement and evolution over time and space and how they as actors make their own history by repeatedly battling external constraints and adversities. The significance of their accounts rests not on authenticity, but on their viewpoints on the world they have lived in and their commentaries on their life processes, bearing facets of determination, ambivalence, and even regret. They wanted me to listen to their stories and to write them down. Both their narration and my writing metaphorically give new life to their past and bring meaning to their present. Through narration, they reconstruct the past as well as themselves.

In the following sections, I juxtapose accounts narrated by the father with those of the son. Belonging to different generations, father and son have related their stories from different perspectives. Nevertheless, as they have shared a part of life together, their narratives overlap to some extent. Their stories are far from complete; there are many fragments, discrepancies, and even mistakes or contradictions. Nonetheless, these defects also reveal their personalities and motives in transmitting their stories to me.

The Father: Arrival in Thailand in 1961

On my second visit, Mr. Li began his story with the military engagement of the 1960s:

"My father was a division chief in Changqingshan, an area which had been under the administrative supervision of Mu Bang *tusi*. Before 1965, Kokang was ruled by the Yang family. In 1959, the Burmese government

14. His words in Chinese are: "wodeyisheng dou aihu renmin chile henduoku women shi buaiqian ai mingyi."

demanded the handover of political power from the native officials of Shan State. Yet, the Yang family refused to comply. In 1962, General Ne Win seized the reins of power through a coup. The next year, the government captured several members of the Yang family, including Yang Zhencai, the incumbent native official. Yang Zhensheng [*alias* Jimmy Yang], a brother of Yang Zhencai, led a local defense guard to fight against the state army. In 1965, he brought a remnant of the guard numbering about one thousand to northern Thailand and collaborated with the ousted former Burmese prime minister U Nu. His troops were camped near the headquarters of the KMT Third Army in Tham Ngob.

"In 1961, several years prior to Yang Zhensheng's military action, I had already led about forty soldiers from my home village to join the Third Army in Tham Ngob. I was young and ambitious [*nianqing zhiqigao*]. General Li Wenhuan was a good leader, despite his being authoritarian.[15] He gave me three machine guns—one from Taiwan, one from Canada, and one from Czechoslovakia—and forty rifles. Later on, he gave me another American A64 machine gun. My troops and I received training at the headquarters for one month and then returned to northern Burma to recruit more soldiers. My troops were code-named the Second Independent Regiment. In 1963, forty to fifty of my troops went to Tham Ngob again for training. They stayed for nearly a year and then returned to Changqingshan."

Mr. Li did not mention his unit's mission. It is quite possible that it assisted General Li in drug trafficking from northern Shan State to Thailand. Although they had retreated to Thailand, Generals Li and Duan respectively deployed a part of their forces in Shan State to facilitate drug trafficking. According to Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, their military bases were scattered across an area of some 20,000 square miles (32,187 square kilometers), covering nearly one-third of Shan State (1990, 124–49). Li and Duan led two major opium-trading groups in the region during the 1960s and 1970s.[16] Mr. Li further described the financial aid General Li provided his forces in Burma:

"The Third Army had several supply bases in Shan State. With money brought from Thailand, these bases purchased rice in Burma for the troops

15. For the organization of the KMT Third and Fifth Armies and their leadership see my paper "Identification of Leadership among the KMT Yunnanese Chinese in Northern Thailand" (Chang 2002).

16. For more information on the drug issue see Chao Tzang Yawnghwe (1993), Lintner (1994, 239–71), and McCoy (1991).

stationed in the state. Apart from rationed rice, each soldier was provided thirty kyat per month for non-staple food [*fushifei*]. The money was given to the adjutant in charge of buying food in each troop. The adjutant could use the money for trade; for example, he could invest it in buying opium. After the commodity had been sold, the profit belonged to the troop. In addition, every soldier received twenty kyat as pocket money per month. At that time one Burmese kyat could be exchanged for two Thai baht. One chicken was valued at about one kyat. The commanding officer of a regiment received two hundred kyat per month and another fifty kyat for food.

"The Third Army had its best time from 1967 to 1970. Its total number of soldiers in Burma and Thailand reached four thousand to five thousand. The Fifth Army was weaker. It had one thousand to two thousand soldiers. The two armies levied taxes on businessmen in the drug trade, and they helped escort traders' caravans back and forth between Thailand and Burma. Whenever a drug caravan was leaving for Thailand, their troops in Burma would send a telegram to their headquarters in Thailand. The headquarters would decide on the number of soldiers required to escort the caravan. The size of a caravan varied each time. Usually it was between one hundred to two hundred mules. Sometimes it may have amounted to several hundred. One mule was loaded with forty *zuai* of goods.[17]

"The armies recruited soldiers from different parts of Shan State. Their military bases were not fixed. They moved from place to place depending on the situation. When a troop was on the move, every soldier carried a bag of rice, a suit of clothes, a water pitcher, two pieces of tarpaulin (one to put on the ground, and the other above) and three blankets (one to put on the ground tarpaulin, the other two to cover the body). The size of a tarpaulin sheet was two meters by two meters. Each regiment had a few mules that carried kitchenware and food.

"In 1965, I went to Tham Ngob again for training and stayed there until 1968. That year I told General Li of my decision to leave the army to return to Burma and join the KKY forces. Northern Shan State had become a battlefield. The Communist Party of Burma [CPB] was gaining control in Kokang and Changqingshan. The KKY unit I led had about 300 soldiers. About 150 were in charge of growing opium; the other 150

17. One *zuai* (in Shan) or one *peittha* (in Burmese) is traditionally known as a *viss* in English, equivalent to around 1.6 kilograms.

were on guard. Fifty of them followed me around. But when the situation required it, all troops participated in fighting.

"Changqingshan produced the best opium. Half of the harvested opium grown by my troops became the common property [of our unit]; the profit from the other half was divided equally among all the soldiers, including those who planted the crop as well as those on military duty. Between 1969 and 1972, there were a lot of battles. Our troop fought alongside another Burmese troop, also numbering about three hundred soldiers. They did not grow opium, but were financially supported by the government. However, the Burmese troops were bad; they often troubled civilians. Yet, within my sphere of influence, they dared not misbehave. My ruling philosophy was to 'suppress the bully and assist the weak' [*yaqiang tiruo*]. Once I joined the KKY, I could buy supplies from the Burmese government cheaply, and then resell part of the goods to civilians. In 1973, the government disbanded the KKY,[18] and I moved to Mong Nai [or Mone]. There were eight hundred Kokang households in Mong Nai."

In the course of the interviews, while delineating a sociopolitical picture of Shan State and northern Thailand in the 1960s and early 1970s, Mr. Li portrayed himself as a hero who bravely pursued his military career for the good of his people. Since the mid-1960s, the situation in Kokang had become more and more unstable. The area was torn between three major military forces—the CPB, the KKY, and Yang Zhensheng's troops (Cai 1989, 21; Sai Kam Mong 2007, 267).[19] The KKY were supposed to fight against the CPB alongside the Burmese army, but many of them were more interested in the drug trade. A great advantage to joining the KKY was obtaining permission from the government for this trade. Despite the wartime situation, the trafficking persisted. Several KKY troops were in alliance with the KMT armies for this highly lucrative business. In 1969, the CPB took control of Kokang. Thousands of Kokangs fled to other places, such as Lashio, Kutkai, Pinlong, Nansan, Mong Nai, and Taunggyi.

18. The change of policy was because of the KKY's inability to fight the Communist Party of Burma and also because of pressure from the US government, which accused these ethnic militias of engaging in drug trafficking (Chen 1996, 193–94).

19. Sai Kham Mong wrote: "In the Northeast Military Region of Kokang, Wa and Kachin sub-state, there were altogether twenty-three groups of Ka Kwe Ye formed with 4,211 men" (2007, 267). Among them, the unit led by Luo Xinghan was most powerful. The CPB in Kokang was led by Peng Jiasheng (or Pheung Kya Shin) (Chen 1996, 186–203; Lintner 1994, 201–37).

A portion of them escaped to northern Thailand and resettled in a range of Yunnanese villages founded by the KMT Third Army. Fighting went on in northern Shan State until the late 1980s.

The Son: Life in Changqingshan and Mong Nai

Complementary to his father's account that referred to the complex geopolitics in Shan State during the 1960s and the early 1970s, Guoguang talked about its impacts on civilians' lives. He said:

"While living in Changqingshan, whenever we saw airplanes coming, we rushed to *tudong* to hide. Every household had its own *tudong*. It was a cave dug in the ground; the mouth was covered with a wooden board, and some earth was put on the board. The size of a *tudong* correlated with the size of a household. Everyone had to hide in his or her own household's *tudong*. If you had tried to enter someone else's, they would not have allowed you in.

"Because of ongoing fighting in Changqingshan, many families gradually moved away. My grandfather had two wives. He took the first grandmother, the fourth, fifth, and seventh uncles, and the second, third, fourth, and fifth aunts, totaling more than twenty people, to Reshuitang Xincun [Xincun] in Thailand. Later on they all moved to Taiwan. My father moved us to a village named Nakhan [in 1972], sixteen kilometers from Mong Nai. I was about seven years old, the age to go to school. We lived there for a few years.

"When we first arrived, there were only twenty to thirty Chinese households in the village. Gradually the number increased to four to five hundred. At that time, the Burmese government did not allow Chinese education. My grandfather on my mother's side taught us some Chinese at home every morning before we went to the Burmese school. Our village bordered a river. On the other side of the river was a Shan village. The Burmese primary school was located in that village. Chinese students and Shan students did not mingle, and sometimes we got into group fights. We felt we were from one side, and they were from the other. We were very young, but the distinction existed. Whenever we were in a fight, the Shan students would say: 'We are going to call the Shan army to beat you.' We would shout back, 'We are going to call the Kokang troops to beat you.'

Since childhood we felt like refugees lacking state protection. The Burmese government did not allow self-rule in Kokang. Even if you carried a *hmatpontin* [identification card], the policeman still made trouble for you and insisted the card was a fake.

"One night, when I was around [nine] years old [in 1974],[20] Khun Sa's troops fought their way to our village. Possibly a Kokang troop had attacked one of their Shan villages earlier. They regarded our village as being connected with that Kokang troop and came for revenge. Our village was not armed at all, and villagers had to run when the troop came. It was around seven o'clock in the evening. Some villagers shouted: 'Shan soldiers have come to fight us.' Behind our house was a field of tall corn. Our whole family hid in the cornfield. My youngest sister who was still small was scared and crying. Adults had to cover her mouth. We had no time to take anything with us from the house. We had to let the Shan soldiers rob us of whatever they wanted. Hiding in the cornfield, we heard a lot of shooting around us. That night forty to fifty people were injured. The next morning, all the villagers fled to Mong Nai to ask the local government for help. However, the Mong Nai government was afraid of provoking an attack from the Shan troop if they helped us. They didn't want us to stay, but after a long negotiation, they allowed us to settle temporarily in the market, which had many stalls used for selling goods in the daytime. After the market ended, we could use those stalls. All the villagers, two hundred to three hundred people, slept in them that night. Those who were better off left the market the next day. Slowly, the rest moved to other places too. Some went to Pinlong, some to Laikha, and some to Lashio. My father took us and a few other households to Loilin."

Guoguang's memory of his childhood was replete with fighting and fleeing. Shan State (as well as many other parts of Burma) was torn apart by different military groups; the people were compelled to side with one group or another. Sai Kham Mong wrote, "While some locals like Kachins, Shans, and Kokang were enlisted in the [Ka Kwe Ye] groups and fought alongside [government troops], some locals joined the [CPB]" (2007, 267). Fighting occurred among the KKY forces and ethnic insurgent groups, often not because of political differences but because of conflicts over the

20. Guoguang originally said twelve years old. However, I double-checked with his father, who said the incident occurred in 1974. Guoguang would have been nine years old then.

opium trade. The most prominent example was the opium battle of 1967 between the KMT forces and Khun Sa's troops.[21] Prolonged warfare caused people great hardship. A large number of civilians became refugees in their own country, running away from one military group to the protection of another and from one place to another, as Guoguang told in his story.

The Father: From 1969 to 1975

Notwithstanding the ongoing warfare, underground trade continued. Many ethnic insurgent groups and the KKY forces undertook this lucrative business to empower themselves. Mr. Li related his involvement in the trade:

"The state provided a limited number of old weapons to the KKY forces, so they basically had to arm themselves. Most weapons were purchased in Thailand and Laos. The war in Indochina was going on, and many American arms were stolen and smuggled out for sale. General Li of the KMT Third Army controlled a good number of smuggled arms. He traded them with allied KKY forces and some other ethnic rebels connected with him. Sometimes he gave weapons to these groups as a token of collaboration.

"Our lives were very harsh then. It was pure luck that we survived those days. The government sold us goods cheaply, and we then sold them again. Goods purchased with one hundred thousand kyat could be resold for two hundred thousand kyat. Sometimes the profit was more than double. As we were a KKY troop, we could apply to the government to buy various kinds of goods, including textiles, rice, gasoline, cement, tires, salt, sugar, tobacco, clothes, flour, peanuts, corn, bicycles, jeeps, and so on. The jeeps were left over from the Second World War. One jeep cost only about one

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21. Khun Sa was regarded as the biggest drug warlord in Southeast Asia in the 1980s. He founded the Shan United Army and claimed to fight for the independence of the Shan people in Burma. Yet his claim was regarded as a pretext for his engagement in drug trafficking. Many of his officers had been KMT guerrillas. It was said that in the early stages of his career, he received some weapons from General Li. With an increased grip on power, he wanted to control the opium trade, and he refused to pay Li and Duan taxes when passing through their territories. Li and Duan collaborated to punish Khun Sa for challenging their authority. For details of the battle, see Lintner (1994, 245) and McCoy (1991, 333–34).

thousand kyat. At that time, a big truck was only a few thousand kyat. We also levied an opium tax on the local people, at the rate of 20 percent of their production. In addition, the troop grew its own opium. The state army enlisted people by force, but the KKY didn't do so. My troop protected people within my domain."

"How did the KKY recruit their soldiers?" I questioned.

"If a household had two sons, then one was recruited. If a household had four or five, then two of them were recruited. In 1971 or 1972, we fought a big battle. A part of my troop was stationed in a post named Shuangkengshan, located in Changqingshan. There were about fifty soldiers. A Burmese troop with around the same number of soldiers was stationed nearby. One day the CPB attacked us. They had more than twenty-four hundred people and surrounded our post. Our troop had prepared well, and all the soldiers hid themselves in the trenches. We fought for seven days and nights. We didn't even have time to cook. The CPB had a large number; they took turns firing arms day and night. Our number was too small, and the soldiers were not able to rest. Some were too tired and fell asleep even while fighting. Our machine guns kept smoking because of nonstop firing. One of my soldiers was especially brave. He alone killed more than fifty CPB soldiers. The CPB troop leader ordered him caught alive. On the seventh day, my soldiers became exhausted. The CPB troop then stormed us. They stood up and ran at us directly, not even trying to cover themselves. In the end, we were not able to sustain the defense. The whole barrack was destroyed. Only a few soldiers managed to escape, including that very brave one. We had killed more than 150 CPB soldiers. Our side had about 30 soldiers dead and another 15 captured."

"How about you?" I asked.

Mr. Li smiled and said: "I was not in this battle. I was lucky. I had been away in another place. We had radio communication at that time, but the CPB force was too strong. It took time to recruit support. The Burmese army finally sent three brigades and other KKY troops, including Luo Xinghan's troop, to the battlefield. The number totaled about three thousand. They fought for forty-two days to chase away the CPB."

I was surprised to learn of Mr. Li's absence after having listened to his narration of the battle and the bravery of his troop. If I had not questioned his whereabouts, would he have revealed his absence? Perhaps not. His speaking about the war was very much done to demonstrate his troops'

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bravery and the importance of his leadership. As he did not participate in the battle, he must have crafted the story based on what he had heard from his surviving troops as well as his understanding and imagination. The sharp contrast between the number of his troops and that of the CPB seems to be unbelievable. Yet the important point is how he has remembered the event. Through remembering (and perhaps distorting some of the facts) and recounting the experience, Mr. Li gives new meaning to the former hardship and suffering that he and his troops had gone through during a chaotic time. But why did he not tell me of a fighting experience he personally encountered? Was he involved more in the underground trade than military action? Before I got a chance to express my doubt, Mr. Li went on to tell me about the intricate relationships between armed ethnic groups. He said:

"We had contact with different groups—the Third and Fifth Armies, Khun Sa's army, and Luo Xinghan's army. We were all together."

"But didn't you fight against one another?"

"Sometimes we did, sometimes not. When we were not at war, we were friends." Mr. Li laughed.

Obviously there was no continuity of alliance or enmity between armed ethnic groups. It was the groups' interests that determined conflict or collaboration. Subsequently, I asked him about the 1974 attack of Khun Sa's troops on Nakhan village, which Guoguang had related. He said:

"They were not Khun Sa's troops. It was another Shan unit. We had stayed there less than a year when the incident occurred. They killed eight villagers and captured twenty-five that night."

"Where were you?"

"I was in Pinlong. I went there for business. I was lucky again."

"Why did you move your family to Nakhan?" I asked.

"The KKY forces were disbanded in 1973. I then left Changqingshan. Actually before Nakhan, I had moved my family to Lashio a year earlier. It cost a lot of money to live there. There were always people who came to ask for help."

"How was life in Nakhan?"

"We grew crops—rice, corn, peanuts, and sesame."

"No opium?"

"No, not after 1973. The land in Nakhan was fertile. You sowed one bucket of seed; you would harvest one hundred buckets later. I took care

of the other Kokang households who followed me there. Young people came to help on my farm voluntarily. After the attack by the Shan troop in Nakhan, I moved my family to Loilin.[22] About ten households followed me. Prior to my arrival, the Kala [of South Asian origin] in Loilin didn't allow Chinese to live in the village. They were Muslim. They forbade the Chinese to eat pork. I was not afraid of the Kala. I told my people to retain the habit of eating pork. Because of my persistence, the Kala dared not trouble us. In Loilin, I started my business of selling clothes and textiles in the market. I went to Taunggyi to purchase the commodities and brought them back to Loilin for sale. My house in Loilin is still there. My second son's family lives there now."

Mr. Li's narration provides more information on trade than military action. This seems to suggest that his priority at the time was business. Moreover, his mention of the Kala at the end made me think of Guoguang's narrative of the conflict between the Chinese and Shan students. Although many informants described reciprocal interaction with other ethnic groups in their everyday lives and economic undertakings, an ethnic boundary existed and resulted in tension under different circumstances (as also shown in Zhang Dage's and Ae Maew's stories).[23]

With reference to Tsing's interpretation (2005) of "friction across difference" grounded in the case of the Dayaks' overlapping relations with the Indonesian government, transnational enterprises, international nongovernmental organizations, and local environmentalists and nature lovers, Mr. Li and his troop's connections and clashes with multiple military groups and their participation in the opium trade point to a comparable history involving different layers of power structure. It was an intriguing history of politico-economy against a backdrop of Burmese isolationism, ethnic division, and the Cold War, which were activated by continuous "illicit" flows of people, resources, commodities, capital, and information (McCoy 1991; Lintner 1994). The question of legality was overshadowed by competition for power. While being shaped by this gigantic historical process, Mr. Li and his group, despite their borderland origin and relatively small-scale

22. According to Mr. Li's narration, he moved his family from Changqingshan to Lashio in 1972, from Lashio to Nakhan in 1973. The attack on Nakhan took place in 1974; the family fled at that time to Mong Nai. Mr. Li moved the family from Mong Nai to Loilin in 1975.

23. I will probe this subject further in the following chapters.

military force, also reacted to it with their adaptive strategies in various domains of everyday life—farming, trading, and fighting wars. Mr. Li's narration together with Guoguang's account above gives a nuanced picture of how various military entities' entrenchment affected local people's lives, resulting in continuous migration and shifting affiliations with these forces. Both the civilians' and armed groups' activities in effect intersected state and nonstate powers beyond Burmese national borders.

Later I made a visit to Loilin with Guoguang. The trip was four hours from Taunggyi by motorcycle through a mountain road with endless turns. This road had been used in the past for transporting black market goods between Taunggyi and Loilin. The landscape of mountains, valleys, pine forests, paddy fields, and rivers was impressive, but the road was very bumpy. During the 1970s and 1980s, Taunggyi was the center of the black market trade in upper Burma. Traders came here to buy wholesale goods that were mostly smuggled from Thailand by mule caravans.

Guoguang took me to the market at Loilin. He pointed out the location where his family had once owned two shops. His mother, sisters, and a few workers looked after the shops, and his father was in charge of replenishing goods from Taunggyi. While in Loilin, I stayed at their house. It has partly been rebuilt. Guoguang showed me the original site of the kitchen and a section for workers and soldiers. Despite the KKY's disbandment, Mr. Li had maintained around twenty soldiers. The kitchen had been torn down, but two big cooking stoves still remained, evoking images of life in the past.

The Son: Leaving for Thailand in 1985

Guoguang lived in Loilin from 1975 to 1985. Not long after his graduation from high school, he left home for Thailand. He said:

"One day two young men from Changqingshan arrived at our house. One was eighteen years old, named Changshou [long life]. The other was twenty, named Qiwu [seven five]. Qiwu was born the year his grandfather was seventy-five years old. The family thus named him Qiwu. They were on their way to Thailand. My father was in charge of the Ethnic Kokang Cultural Association of the area, so they came to stay at our house for a couple of days. I was nineteen years old and had just finished high school.

They asked me to join them on the journey to Thailand. Changshou had seven thousand kyat with him; Qiwu had about ten thousand kyat. They said to me, 'Guoguang, you come with us. We will take care of your spending on the way. We young people should go out into the world to explore our future [*dao waimian quchuang*].' I was very keen on the idea. In fact, I had been thinking of going somewhere before meeting them. I thus left a letter for my family telling them I had gone and asking them not to look for me. I was afraid I would attract attention, so I didn't take any clothes or luggage with me. We took a government truck that transported supplies to the border area. The fare for one person was two hundred kyat.

"The road was bumpy, and public security was bad. The truck went slowly, sometimes only seven or eight kilometers a day. The driver stopped frequently for security checks, sending a person ahead to make sure there was no ambush by Shan rebels. Then the truck went for a short distance and stopped again to check. We proceeded very slowly in this way. On the fourth day after my departure from home, our truck was attacked. Two Burmese soldiers were shot dead. On the seventh day, the truck finally reached its last stop—Mongton—which was one day's walk from the Burmese-Thai border. I had an aunt living in Mongton. I went to look for her. On seeing me, she chided me for leaving home without telling my family. My aunt's living conditions were not good. She had been 'stolen' [*tou*] by my uncle when he was serving in a rebel troop.[24] She had been to Thailand before. She gave all her husband's money to me, two hundred kyat. She also stole a pair of sneakers from him. They were the shoes he wore to weddings. She then gave me a traveling bag with some of her husband's shirts inside. I was still young and didn't think much about this. When her husband discovered later what she had done, he must have beaten her.

"We hired an oxcart to take us to Dagudi.[25] There was a checkpoint near the border. On seeing Burmese soldiers, we were scared and started to run. The Burmese soldiers fired shots at us. Luckily, the bullets didn't hit us. We abandoned our luggage while running. When we reached Dagudi, we did not have a change of clothes.

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24. It occurred often in Shan State that women were "stolen" for marriage. In some cases, the action was prearranged between the man and woman; in other cases, it was carried out by force (see chapter 6).

25. Dagudi (Arunotai in Thai) is a Yunnanese border village, which has been the first stop in Thailand for many Yunnanese from Burma.

"When we were in Mongton, my aunt told me to look for one of my father's former subordinates—a company commander [*lianzhang*]—once I arrived in Dagudi. I found the house of that company commander. He let us stay and suggested we plant potatoes in the village. That day he killed a chicken for us. Changshou decided to stay in Dagudi. However, Qiwu's and my ambition [*zhiqi*] was not to plant potatoes in Dagudi. Our ambition was to go to Chiang Mai or Bangkok to explore the world [*datianxia*]. We were naive at that time. We couldn't speak a word of Thai, and we had no Thai identities either. Three days later, Qiwu and I went to Xinchun by taking a pickup truck.[26] The fare was fifty baht for one person. Before leaving the village, the company commander told us to look for Teacher Li when we arrived in Xinchun.

"When we went to Teacher Li's house, he told us that we could both work in his lychee orchard. He would provide board and lodging, but no salary. Qiwu had an uncle who lived in Chiang Mai. He called him, and few days later his uncle came to take him to Chiang Mai. The three of us thus stayed in separate places—one in Dagudi, one in Xincun, and one in Chiang Mai. We wrote to one another about our lives. Qiwu often described the bustling life of Chiang Mai, while I related my days in the orchard. As for Changshou, he often complained about the harsh work in Dagudi, and about how many days he had not been able to take a shower. We told our tales in letters that we handed to drivers for delivery.

"In Teacher Li's orchard, there was another worker who had arrived before me. He was also from Burma. His name was Caobin. The boss paid him eight hundred baht a month. He was very kind and caring to me. Each time he received his salary, he gave me some money. Sometimes he took me to a noodle shop for a treat. The food provided by our boss was very simple: cold rice with some fermented soybean curd and vegetable pickles. Our job was to guard the orchard. When lychees became ripe, Thai people would come to steal. They were organized and came in trucks. Each Thai worker was given a basket and would quickly pick lychees and then leave

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26. Guoguang's grandfather and many family members had migrated to Xincun earlier. There used to be private pickup trucks that offered transportation between Xincun and Dagudi every morning. As more and more villagers own cars, this transportation service has gradually declined since 2000.

in the truck that brought them. Our boss gave us a rifle. He said that when we saw lychee branches shaking, we should fire the rifle in the air. I was very thin at that time and dared not fire the rifle. I let Caobin do the job.

"At that time, Xinchun was quite disorderly. Many people were drug addicts. While walking in the village, you were sometimes approached by drug dealers. They put heroin in cigarettes and sold them for ten to twenty baht each. However, Qiwu, Changshou, and I were resistant. None of us became drug addicts.

"Later on I met an important person [*guiren*] in Xincun. It was a turning point in my life. His name was Ahao, from Fujian in China. He had flown to Thailand with a Chinese passport. He had a rich uncle who owned a business in Bangkok dealing in water pipes. He had a quarrel with his uncle and came to the north to relax. Maybe someone had told him about Xincun. I was having a drink in a shop. My table still had a spare seat, and he sat next to me. We started to chat. Later on I took him to my orchard. Ahao then asked me, 'Guoguang, would you like to go to Bangkok with me?' I said OK. We were together in Xincun for a few days and got to know each other better. I saw him as a trustworthy friend.

"So I told my boss that I was leaving for Bangkok. By then, I had worked there for three months. The boss said OK but didn't give me any money. Caobin accompanied me to the provincial road to wait for the bus. He was sad about my leaving. He cried and gave me an envelope to open after I was on the bus. In it was a letter and fifteen hundred baht. He was paid only eight hundred baht a month, and every month he had given me one hundred to two hundred baht. He must have saved this fifteen hundred baht over several months. I was very touched and cried. Ahao was sitting next to me. He didn't know what had happened and patted my shoulder.

"When we arrived in Chiang Mai, we bought tickets for the night bus that went directly to Bangkok. Ahao told me that if the policeman got on the bus to check, I should just pretend to be sleeping. He had a legal identity. He sat on the aisle seat and let me sit next to the window. A policeman came by once, but luckily, he didn't check on me. I fell asleep, and seven or eight hours later Ahao woke me up. I opened my eyes and suddenly saw a prosperous world full of high-rise buildings and overpasses. There was a lot of noise and smoke from cars, different kinds of cars, unlike those in

Burma, which were mostly left behind from the Second World War. I was dazzled. My fear of encountering police subsided.

"After getting off the bus, Ahao hired a *tuk-tuk*[27] that took us to his factory site. His one-room lodging was crude. It was a bit slanted, and behind it were a detached kitchen and a toilet. It was the rainy season, and water had accumulated around the lodge's stilts. His uncle owned the factory. He didn't want to live with his uncle and had asked to stay alone on the factory site.

"The next morning, Ahao took me to eat *kuaytiaw* [noodles] at a nearby corner stall. Afterward, he told me to stay at the lodge and went to work. That noon he brought back a lunch box for me. I was not related to him at all, but he took care of me. I was very grateful. A few days later, I asked Ahao to give me some money to go to the market. I told him I could cook for him. Anyway, I couldn't stand eating out of a lunch box every day. He gave me fifty baht and told me to tell him when I had used up the money. Every morning I went to the market. Before going, I would ask the Thai names for the items I wanted to buy. But very often by the time I got to the market, I had forgotten the correct names. Sellers couldn't understand me and were amused by my way of speaking. On figuring out what I wanted to buy, they would teach me the correct terms. I gradually learned some Thai.

"Every day I cooked and waited for Ahao to come back to eat. I calculated the time and had the meal cooked before he returned. After eating, he often fought with me over the dishwashing. I told him: 'You have worked all day and are tired. Let me do the dishes.'

"One Sunday, Ahao took me to Yaowarat [the Chinatown in Bangkok]. Before going there, he said: 'Guoguang, you must be missing your hometown a lot. I am going to take you to a place where there are *xidoufen*, *yancai*, and *babasi*.'[28] Having stayed on the factory site for a few weeks, I was excited about seeing this Chinatown. It was packed with people on Sunday. I was interested in different kinds of Chinese food. Ahao bought a shirt for me. While eating *xidoufen* in a shop, I met Acao, a friend from Loilin. He had come to Thailand a year earlier. I was very happy to see him. We talked a long time. Acao told me he would ask his boss if he would hire me. He asked me to meet him a week later at the same place.

27. *Tuk-tuk* is a motorized tricycle used as a type of local taxi in Thailand.

28. These are common Yunnanese dishes. *Xidoufen* is gruel cooked from ground garden peas; *yancai* is pickled vegetable; *babasi* is Yunnanese cooked noodles.

"At that time, the bus fare was two baht each time, notwithstanding the distance. I took the bus to Yaowarat alone the following Sunday and met Acao. He said I could work at his factory. He then accompanied me back to Ahao's place to pick up my luggage. Ahao was hence left alone in his lodge. I had stayed with him for two months.

"Acao's boss was in the scrap metal business. There were sixteen workers at the factory who were all Yunnanese from Burma around age twenty or twenty-one. Our boss was from Taiwan. He hired us because we were cheaper and we spoke Chinese. I got eight hundred baht a month. The salary was paid once every week, two hundred baht each time. The boss provided lodging but no food. After each paycheck, every worker put twenty to fifty baht away as the common fund for food. We took turns going to market. We cooked Yunnanese dishes and spoke with each other in our own language.[29] The factory was a small Yunnanese society. I was happy there. Every weekend, Acao, Ahao, and I went to Yaowarat for fun. Ahao worked for his uncle, but he didn't go to the factory every day. Sometimes he came to our factory and hung out with us. However, he had good pay—seven to eight thousand baht a month.

"I was in that factory for six months. One day our boss was caught by the police for drug trafficking. He was found possessing fifty kilos of heroin in his car. After he was caught, the Thai police surrounded our factory and carried out a search, but nothing was found. We were not aware of his involvement in drugs at all. Later on we heard that he had several cars that he used for transporting narcotics from Chiang Mai to Bangkok. All the workers were illegal immigrants. When the police came and surrounded the factory, everyone tried to run away, but eleven were caught; only five escaped. I was taking a shower at that time, so I hid myself in the bathroom and was not found. Acao also got away. Those who were caught were delivered to Mae Sai to await expulsion. The five of us didn't know what to do next. Acao called Ahao. Ahao came and proposed we sell all the scrap metal in the factory. He said if we didn't sell it, the Thai police would take it anyway. The boss had no relatives or friends in Bangkok. His wife was in Taiwan and dared not come to Thailand for fear of being caught as well. Ahao spoke Thai well and was experienced. He contacted buyers and hired trucks to transport the scrap. We got more than three hundred

29. Yunnanese is similar to Mandarin Chinese and belongs to the same language family.

thousand baht from the sale. We gave fifty thousand baht to Ahao. He had helped us so much. At first he didn't want to take the money, but we insisted. We divided the rest of the money equally among sixteen people, with nearly twenty thousand baht for each one. We took a bus to Mae Sai to look for our friends. Ahao helped to find out their whereabouts just before they were expelled, and he gave them the money. They were very grateful for the unexpected money.

"Acao and I used our share of the money to start a small business selling *youtiao*.[30] We first learned how to make it with a Yunnanese friend from Xincun, who spent two weeks teaching us. Then we started to sell *youtiao* from a small cart. While selling it, we had to keep an eye out for the police. Whenever they came, we had to run. In the third month, a policeman came. We quickly took our money and ran. But when we returned to look for our cart, it was already gone.

"Two weeks later, I met a lady typist who worked at Xianluo [Huaqiao] Ribao [a Chinese newspaper company in Bangkok]. Thanks to my earlier Chinese education, she found me work there as a data caretaker. I got eighteen hundred baht a month, pretty good pay. I then rented a small studio of my own. The rent was six hundred baht a month. Every day I spent two baht to get to work by bus and another two baht to get home. The work started at nine o'clock in the morning and ended at three in the afternoon. I also bought myself a few shirts and two pairs of trousers. Before going to work I put some pomade on my hair. I had become a white-collar employee. Every weekend, I still met Ahao and Acao. I had better pay now, although not as good as Ahao's. So, I fought to pay for food and drinks each time. In the past, they had always paid for me.

"One day, when we were drinking beer together, Ahao suddenly said he was going back to Fujian because he missed his family a lot. I thought Ahao might have been feeling low or drunk and didn't take much notice of what he said. But two days later, he went to the police station to report himself as an illegal alien. His visa had already expired. We dared not visit him because of our illegal status. Later on he was expelled. Since then I have lost contact with him.

30. *Youtiao*, a fritter of twisted dough, is a Chinese specialty for breakfast. It is also common in Thai cities because of the influences of ethnic Chinese.

"I worked at the newspaper company for more than a year and saved a few dozen thousand baht. I didn't want to keep on working at the company. I wanted to go to Taiwan. Through a friend's connections, I spent twenty-five thousand baht on buying a Thai passport. It was a real passport. I used someone's name and birth information, but the photo on the passport was mine. When going through customs, I was scared. I spoke Thai with an accent. Whatever questions the officer asked me, I kept on answering '*khap*, *khap*, *khap*.' "[31]

I was very much taken by Guoguang's story, especially by the camaraderie he shared with his friends. It displays the human kindness, joy, and courage generated and supported by difficult living conditions. The story underlines the youthful propensity for pursuit of ambition in the outside world that drove Guoguang, Changshou, Qiwu, Ahao, and Acao to meet and care for each other. The part about Guoguang and Ahao is particularly poignant, indicating an intimate connection. In contrast to bustling Bangkok, the crude lodge they stayed in provided warmth and protection.

Since I started my research in 1994 among Yunnanese migrants in northern Thailand, I have met many young Yunnanese people from Burma. They had risked their lives on perilous journeys and entered the country illegally. After arriving in Thailand, most of them stayed a short period in Yunnanese villages along the border that functioned as their transfer stops for later journeys to Chiang Mai or Bangkok. While in these villages, most men worked as farmworkers and women as domestic servants. Their goals and experiences were similar to Guoguang's. Thailand was a dream and a future for them. However, some were not so lucky and failed to reach their destinations or even died on the way.[32] For those who had entered the country, more challenges awaited them.

The movement of migrant Yunnanese was greatly facilitated by their intragroup nexuses, as Guoguang's (and also Zhang Dage's) story has shown. Many informants often stress that Yunnanese are close-knit and commonly trust only people who are known to them. These are usually *laoxiang*—countrymen, preferably from their home village. I was told this

31. *Khap* is an affirmation used by men in Thai.

32. The death of fifty-four Burmese illegal migrants on April 9, 2008, due to suffocation in the back of a freezer truck during transportation to Ranong, a border town in southern Thailand, highlights the tragedy of and risks undertaken by illegal migrants from Burma.

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tendency is geographic in origin, as the mountainous topography naturally isolates places in Yunnan from each other. The KMT Third Army was traditionally known for its regional solidarity and was referred to as "younger dependent troops" (*zidibing*), placing emphasis on their kinship and territorial loyalties, since most of them came from Zhenkang, Gengma, and Kokang. External instability and involvement in transnational trade, paradoxically, have made migrant Yunnanese a mobile people, leading them far from home. I have often observed that when two Yunnanese meet for the first time and find they have roots in the same region, they form an immediate bond and compare notes as to whom they know in common. They quickly form networks of *guanxi* (connections). For the Yunnanese in a strange land, these regional connections make up an invaluable web that draws them together in mutual support.[33]

Guoguang's account highlights this feature of kinship and territorial bonds. He was helped in every place by people related to his father or the family in one way or another. These connections are based on references rather than face-to-face familiarity. In other words, one need only refer to a mutual link when seeking help from someone one has never met before. However, one should keep in mind the indebtedness to others and find suitable occasions to pay it back. Guoguang's insistence on paying for food and drinks for Ahao and Acao when they went out illustrates his desire to express his gratitude and return the favor he owed. (The story of Zhang Dage's uncle bringing rice and ham to the landlady also illustrates this reciprocal relationship.)

Although Yunnanese tend to emphasize intragroup bonds, establishing connections with strangers is not impossible. I have observed many cases when they develop networks of connection with non-Yunnanese in trade and even for personal friendship, though to a lesser extent than with Yunnanese fellows. In terms of business transactions, one needs to be flexible, and one is often dependent on institutional organizations that facilitate connections with outsiders. (This type of interaction is especially seen in the jade trade, which I will explore in chapter 7.) With regard to personal friendship, Zhang Dage made friends with Burman neighbors in his

33. The role of kinship and regional networks in migration is not exclusive among Yunnanese or Chinese communities. Scholars of migration studies have explored this subject in a wide range of migrant societies (e.g., Akanle 2013; Jarnigan 2008; Kyle 2003; Wilson 2009).

childhood. Ae Maew's best friend during her high school years was a Shan girl. In this chapter, Guoguang treasured his companionship with Ahao. Such friendship also attests to individual openness that is not entirely constrained by intragroup bonding.

After Guoguang left Thailand, he never again saw these friends mentioned in the story. He said:

"They had no fixed residence. I heard Acao died because of some kind of lung disease. It was from his work that he had inhaled too much poisonous stuff. I heard Changshou returned to Burma later and Qiwu was in Chiang Mai. But I don't know exactly where they are now. I miss Ahao most. I do not have a photo of him. I don't even know his full name. At that time I just called him 'Ahao, Ahao.'"

I could hear the regret in Guoguang's voice. The friendship was of short duration yet deep. Perhaps he blamed himself for not having tried to locate Ahao's contact information in Fujian. He could have gone back to the uncle's factory and asked for the information. What prevented him from doing so? Perhaps it was his continuous pursuit of his goal of going to Taiwan, and perhaps this makes him feel sad now whenever he thinks of the past. Although Guoguang had a wealth of new experiences in Taiwan later, the memory of those youthful days in Thailand has never faded from his mind.

The Father: 1992 Onward

In 1992, Mr. Li led the whole family (except Guoguang) to Mong Hsu to participate in ruby mining. It was a booming enterprise that had started only two years earlier when rubies were discovered there. He said:

"At that time, Mong Hsu was very insecure. There were many different militia groups, including the Wa, the Shan, the Taungthu [Dongsu/Pa-O], and the Karen. More than one hundred thousand people flocked to the place to seek their fortune. The government was not able to control the region. These militias often oppressed the civilians. I couldn't bear the situation and organized a Kokang troop in 1993 to maintain order. In less than a year, more than thirteen hundred soldiers joined. I took charge of excavation in Mong Hsu. My wife took my eldest daughter to Tachileik to sell excavated rubies from our mines. On each occasion, they stayed in a

hotel, and Thai dealers would come to buy the gems. I left Mong Hsu with my family in 1996. During the years of excavation, we made a fortune of over two hundred million kyat. But my youngest son had a gun accident later, and his medication cost the better part of the fortune."

"How did the accident happen?" I asked.

"My son was a bodyguard for a militia leader. He carried his gun while sleeping. The gun accidentally dropped to the ground and went off. The bullet hit his belly and went through his lungs. I sent him to the best hospital in Thailand. I told the doctor to cure him, no matter how much it cost. He has more or less recovered now. My life has been like the rains. Sometimes the drops are big, and sometimes small. But I have never wasted my name."

Just as he skipped over details of his life in Loilin, Mr. Li offered a narration about ruby excavation in Mong Hsu that is sketchy. In contrast to Guoguang's narration, which stressed horizontal friendship, Mr. Li's emphasis on his leadership and accomplishments portrays a world of hierarchy, influenced by relations of power and domination. This contrast illuminates their different positions, personalities, and perspectives on the world. Mr. Li consistently portrayed himself as a leader, not only a leader of his troops but also a leader of his family and his people. I understand that this is what he wanted me to write and how he wanted to be remembered. He may have considered accounts of friends, family, or everyday life to be too soft and trivial. Nevertheless, the extent of his leadership may have been exaggerated. While in Changqingshan, his KKY troop was only a small unit among many other KKY forces. After disbandment in 1973, he handed over most arms to the government, while larger KKY groups, such as the one led by Luo Xinghan, resisted the order and went underground. Moreover, the organization and function of his Kokang troop in Mong Hsu are questionable. On one occasion, he acknowledged that the troop was a unit of ethnic Kokang forces under the leadership of Peng Jiasheng. In other words, it was not his troop. Because he was reluctant to reveal further details, I am unclear about the degree of order maintained by this troop. It may have been one of the forces competing for control of informal taxation in Mong Hsu. Despite lack of details, his history and narration illuminate how Shan State was divided into different groups, as well as the common motive among numerous militia leaders—the pursuit of power and leadership.

I was intrigued that he abruptly ended his story with his youngest son's accident. In contrast to his other heroic accounts, this brief revelation reveals his soft side as a caring father. A melancholic expression overtook him as he told me about it, and I felt awkward asking further questions. Yet I wondered why he did not keep this son working for him, and why this son wanted to join an ethnic militia group while his eldest brother had chosen another direction. Only later when talking to Guoguang about his youngest brother's accident did I learn a missing part to the story. Guoguang said the militia leader was a friend of his father, and it was his father's suggestion that his youngest son work for this leader as a bodyguard. Guoguang did not reveal more information about the connection between his father and this militia leader, but it is clear that Mr. Li regretted his earlier suggestion. He may have felt responsible for the accident. He had the power to control many things, but not fate, as many Yunnanese informants used to say.

Regarding the ruby excavation craze in Mong Hsu, it lasted only for a short period. By the end of the 1990s, it had started to decline. Although the government legalized gem trading and excavation in 1992, it was not able to control the security in all mining areas. Several informants said that between Taunggyi and Mong Hsu there were many robbers who targeted ruby traders and ambushed their cars. The situation around the mines in Mong Hsu was even worse. Different ethnic militias competed to profit from this lucrative enterprise. They demanded taxes from mining companies, traders, and local shops. Conflicts among these ethnic groups occurred frequently, causing great destruction to shops and houses as well as a heavy toll in personal injuries. Despite the great dangers, streams of people flocked to Mong Hsu in search of fortune, as opportunities for making a living in Burma are very limited. Even young children joined this risky trade. (Ae Maew also went there for a short period.)

After his venture in the ruby trade Mr. Li moved his family to Taunggyi. He has since been involved in a series of activities through various collaborations. In 2005, the family started mining metals in Loikaw, Kalaw, and Dawei (Tavoy), an enterprise in collaboration with ethnic militias and Chinese investors. Mr. Li has a gem company license. The Chinese investors provided capital, and ethnic militias supplied local connections. While Guoguang remains in Taunggyi, Mr. Li's three other sons are in charge of mining in three different places. Guoguang had helped with the

application to obtain mining concessions from the government. This had required the payment of much money to various officials. "I carried bags of money with me for this application," he said. After completion of the first term of three years, they will have to rebid for the concessions if they want to continue mining.

The Son: 1987 Onward

Guoguang arrived in Taiwan in 1987 to start another chapter in his life. He said:

"When the airplane landed, it was another world. I was anxious again when going through customs. Although I have two uncles in Taiwan, I didn't go to stay with them. I wanted to be on my own. I had friends who had been to Taiwan, and they told me to take the airport bus to Wugu [an industrial area in New Taipei City]. After getting off the bus, I started to look for accommodations. I checked several hotels and finally chose a cheap one, 150 NT a night. It was still OK in comparison with several places I had stayed in Bangkok. There was a cafeteria next to the hotel. One meal cost twenty-five to twenty-seven NT. The next day, I started to look for work in the nearby area. I checked many factories that posted notices for workers. Finally, one factory was willing to take me. When the job interviewer asked me where I came from I said Thailand because I used a Thai passport. The pay was fifty NT an hour, and the factory provided board and lodging. It was an electroplating factory, very dirty and polluted. No Taiwanese wanted to do such work. All the workers there were illegal laborers from Thailand, totaling fifty-three people. At that time Taiwan had not legalized the entry of foreign laborers. I started to work in that factory on the fourth day after my arrival in Taiwan.

"I spoke both Chinese and Thai. So, one month later, the boss promoted me to the position of foreman, with one thousand NT extra pay each month. Six months later, my pay was upgraded to fifteen thousand NT a month. I supervised fifty-two Thai workers. The factory was very dirty, replete with ammonia, sulfuric acid, nitric acid, hydrochloric acid, and so on. We had to wear long rubber boots. The environment was really filthy, with an awful smell. After I had worked for three years in that factory, the Taiwanese government began tightening the search for illegal foreign laborers and

encouraged voluntary reporting for expulsion that would exempt the illegal worker from a penalty. I then turned myself in at the police station and prepared to leave Taiwan. I had to pay for the procedure fees and air ticket that cost twenty-five thousand NT. On my arrival at the Bangkok airport, the customs officer didn't ask any questions. He looked at my passport and knew I was an expelled Thai worker from Taiwan. I went back to Burma through Mae Sai. It had been six years since I left home."

Actually, Guoguang did not go home alone but with his Taiwanese wife, Chunmei, who had worked at the same factory as an accountant. Before leaving Taiwan, they had registered for marriage. However, in order to stay legally in Taiwan as a spouse, Guoguang needed to go back to Burma to apply for the necessary documents. It took nearly a year to obtain these documents and another half a year to apply to Taiwan as a returned overseas Chinese through a marriage union. This status granted him Taiwanese citizenship after he had stayed for a year in the country. However, it also entailed an obligation of military service, so Guoguang served for two years. Afterward, he went through a few jobs, all in the field of producing computer components. He started as a low-level employee. With his accumulated experience and hard work, he was finally promoted to the position of manager in a company. He said:

"I was paid over sixty thousand NT a month. The company gave me a car. But after some years, I felt life had become more and more mechanical. The company often required employees to work overtime. To meet delivery deadlines, managers often had to help on the production lines. We worked overtime the whole night, went home to sleep for a few hours, and then returned to the company and continued to work. My wife was working too. She got forty thousand NT a month. We had everything—two condominiums and two cars—but not enough time to spend with our children. After paying mortgages for the condominiums and cars, children's educational fees, and our living expenses, we were not able to save much money. Also, I only had a high school education. Although I had been promoted to be a manager, I saw that I would someday be replaced by more qualified young people. The pressure of life in Taiwan was too great. We finally decided to come back to Burma. It had been nearly twenty years between the first time I went to Thailand [in 1985] and my family's return to Burma [in 2004]. It is hard to imagine that I, born in a mountain village in Burma, could have become a manager in a Taiwanese company."

Guoguang and his family seemed happy with their present life. Although the total income from the bookshop, his brokerage, and his wife's teaching was much lower than their income in Taiwan, they could afford to hire two workers to help in the shop and with the housework. They felt life was easier in Burma and their children were happier without the intense educational pressures. Their return, however, is an unusual move. It is far more common for Yunnanese from Burma to remain in Taiwan (like Zhang Dage and Ae Maew) once they find work. Guoguang's children are still young, one studying in high school and the other in primary school. What would they do in their lives? Would they stay in Burma or follow in their father's footsteps to Taiwan or other countries? It would be interesting to track them in the future.

A review of Mr. Li's and Guoguang's career evolution shows their courage in pursuit of their respective ambitions by engaging in a series of journeys. Despite their taking different paths in life, their narratives refer to two significant shared social values that have exerted much influence on the cultivation of Yunnanese/Kokang male subjectivity—exploring the world and enhancing social connections. Drawing on his family background, Mr. Li expanded alliances with a range of military groups—the KMT Third Army, the Burmese army, and other ethnic militias. His appropriation of connections was motivated by a search for power and leadership, and this resulted in his moving from his home place to many other places and even to Thailand. Though rejecting a military path, Guoguang has physically traveled farther than his father. Along the course of his ambitious pursuit, he has largely cultivated his own networks of connections and has crossed several national borders as well as the borders of social status and class—from a migrant worker first in Thailand and then Taiwan, to a company manager with Taiwanese citizenship. Interestingly, he decided to return to Burma after having established his own family and a good life in Taiwan. Both Guoguang's return and his father's persistent devotion to the affairs of Kokang associations underscore their rooted identification in Shan State, Burma.

Despite their somewhat strained relationship, the two social values analyzed above may constitute a common base of understanding between Mr. Li and Guoguang. Mr. Li told me in our last meeting: "On discovering Guoguang's departure, I immediately had my men trace his whereabouts. But I let him go and explore the outside world [*rang ta daowaimian chuang*

yi chuang].” Maybe Mr. Li identified with Guoguang’s will to establish his independence. Maybe this was what he himself had tried to demonstrate in his military activities from a very young age. After all, Yunnanese and Kokang men have been very mobile in history owing to a range of political or economic causes. The word *chuang* (to explore the world) is often used by male informants to refer to their passion for movement and overcoming challenges and frictions. Their engagement in long-distance traveling is often looked upon as heroic by their fellow men. Moreover, their social memory of ancestral migrations encourages them to continue in this trend of cross-border movement in the face of limited opportunities in Burma and its insecure and constraining environment. In the following chapters I will explore these ideas further.