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## 4. Islamic Transnationalism: Yunnanese Muslims

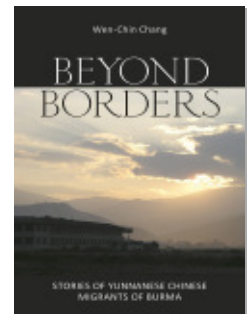
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# ISLAMIC TRANSNATIONALISM

## *Yunnanese Muslims*

While in Burma, I was made to feel that I carried two sins. One was being Chinese, the other being Muslim.

—DEPUTY IMAM BAO in Taiwan, August 28, 2009

Yunnanese Muslims have no homes. Burma is not our home. We are only guests here, even though we have obtained *hmatpontin*.

—GRANDMA MA in Mandalay, January 22, 2005

If the Yunnanese Han feel marginal in Burma, the Yunnanese Muslims sense their peripheral position even more. While the mainstream Burman-Buddhist majority constitutes Burma's core in terms of ethnicity and political power, the Muslims in the country have experienced acute social and religious discrimination imposed by the government, including random arrest, destruction of mosques, confiscation of property, closing of religious schools, and denial of citizenship (Aung Su Shin 2003; Berlie 2008; Priestley 2006; Selth 2003; Tagliacozzo 2014). In addition, since June 2012, ethno-religious violence organized by Buddhist fundamentalists against Muslim communities in Arakan State, Meikhtila, Lewei, Pegu, Yangon, and Lashio have caused grave damage to lives and properties. Among the four main Muslim groups in Burma—Muslims of South Asian origin (often referred to as Indian Muslims or Kala), Rohingyas, Burmese Muslims, and Chinese Muslims—the Rohingyas are especially marginalized and denied citizenship (Berlie 2008, 7; Leider 2012; Selth 2003; Yegar

1982).<sup>1</sup> There is no reliable record of the total Muslim population in Burma, but estimates range from two to eight million (Selth 2003). The Yunnanese Muslims account for only a very small portion of these—around twenty thousand, based on data provided by several Yunnanese Muslim mosques. The group is commonly known as Panthay, but in Chinese they refer to themselves as Chinese Muslims or Yunnanese Muslims or Hui. The use of multiple terms suggests the group's liminality.

The Yunnanese Muslims are as mobile as the Han, and can be found in many towns and cities in Burma, mostly concentrated in upper Burma. They also have fellow communities in Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and the Middle East, and a small number have even migrated from Burma to Western countries. These transnational nexuses have provided multiple functions, including economic support, information about migration, religious communication, and marriage partners. While carrying on their predecessors' peripatetic lifestyle in upper mainland Southeast Asia, their mobility also corresponds to the Islamic traveling tradition for the sake of trade, proselytization, Hajj, or war (Cooke and Lawrence 2005; Cornell 2005; Ho 2006; Tagliacozzo 2013). In this chapter, based on several narrators' accounts of their personal experiences and social memory, I look into the migration history of contemporary Yunnanese Muslims of Burma and their Islamic transnationalism. The key question addressed is: What are the elements that connect diasporic Yunnanese Muslims across a wide range of places and distinguish them from Yunnanese Han and other Muslim groups? The findings point to their anchorage in both Islam and Chinese identity, which helps strengthen their communal and transnational Hui networks and also underscores their ethnic boundary vis-à-vis other Muslim groups. The narrators in the following sections are located in both Burma and Taiwan.

### **Ma Yeye in Kengtung**

I took my first field trip to Kengtung, a scenic historic town, by air in December 2008. The small domestic airliner took off from the Yangon

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1. Popular speculation points to conservative power within the Burmese military as the instigator behind the repeated riots in its effort to set back the Thein Sein government's democratic reforms (*Irrawaddy* 2013).

airport, with multiple stops in Naypyidaw, Mandalay, Heho, Tachileik, and finally Kengtung. As the plane approached eastern Shan State, I looked through the window and saw chains of high mountains below. I pondered that it must have been a challenge to navigate this rugged terrain by means of mule caravans, a traditional mode of transportation for centuries until vehicles gradually replaced them in the 1980s (chapter 5). Air travel has compressed traveling time and spared travelers all the hardship of land travel. Nevertheless, several passengers were vomiting by the time our flight finally landed in Kengtung.

Located in a far eastern corner of Shan State, Kengtung was for centuries a principality that enjoyed its political autonomy while maintaining a tributary relationship with China and Burma. It kept a close relationship through exchange of gifts and royal marriages with neighboring Tai principalities and kingdoms, reaching as far as Sipsong Panna (in southern Yunnan), Lan Na (in northern Thailand), and Lan Zhang (in Laos) (Hsieh 1995). The hereditary ruler was addressed as *saohpa*, meaning Lord of the Heaven, by his people, who were primarily Tai Khoen (also written as Khün) and Tai Lue.<sup>2</sup> The ruling tradition of chieftainship through a hereditary system was recognized by British rule and was continued by the parliamentary government after Burma's independence, until 1959 when the caretaker government led by Ne Win removed it.

Because of its geographical location, Kengtung has been an important trading center connecting with Yunnan to the north, Laos to the east, and Thailand to the south. Historically, the long-distance Yunnanese caravans moved back and forth within these trading networks, and the Yunnanese Muslims were a distinctive group of caravaneers in this region. However, because historical records are scarce, it is difficult to determine exactly when the Yunnanese Muslims began to take up economic activity here. Possibly, when the Mongols brought a large number of soldiers and craftsmen from Central Asia to settle in Yunnan, some of them started to explore these trade route circuits. Nevertheless, major settlement of Yunnanese Muslims in Burma did not take place until the failure of the Muslim Rebellion (1856–1873 CE) (Forbes 1986, 1987).<sup>3</sup>

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2. For the history of Kengtung and Shan State see Conway (2006); Li (2003); Sai Aung Tun (2009); Sao Saimong Mangrai (1965); Scott (1901).

3. In 1868 Yunnanese Muslims constructed their first mosque in Burma on a piece of land bestowed by King Mindon in Mandalay, the capital of the kingdom. Many Yunnanese Muslims,



Figure 4-1. Panthay mosque in Mandalay

The Yunnanese Muslims are also called Yunnanese Hui or Huihui in China, and they belong to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam (Suchart 2010, 111–14). The term *Hui* or *Huihui* became a popular name that referred to all Muslims since the Yuan period, and Islam was termed *Hui jiao* (religion of the Hui). But in 1954, the People's Republic of China created the Hui nationality (*huizu*) and limited its reference to “Sinicized” Muslims. The Hui are located in different parts of the country, and the Yunnanese Muslims are a part of that group. Over centuries, they have absorbed much of the dominant Han Chinese tradition in their everyday life as displayed in their language, dress, food, naming, and housing, among other things, while upholding their Islamic heritage. Apart from the Hui, there are Muslim groups whose members speak Turkic-Altaic and Indo-European Muslim languages in China—the Uighur, Kazakh, Dongxiang, Kirghiz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar (Gladney 1996, xv, 17–20; 2004, 101).

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primarily traders, settled around the mosque (Figure 4-1) and formed a Panthay compound. The compound still exists, located on Eightieth Street, between Thirty-Fifth and Thirty-Sixth Streets; see Maung Maung Lay (1999, 97–100).

In 2008, there were about seventy households of Yunnanese Muslims (and more than seven hundred households of Yunnanese Han) in Kengtung.<sup>4</sup> Most of these Yunnanese Hui parents or grandparents migrated from Yunnan prior to 1949; some are descendants of earlier migrants who came to Burma more than one hundred years ago. Ma Yeye was a key person I intended to interview here.<sup>5</sup> During my former field trips in Mandalay, I had heard from other Yunnanese Muslims about the flight of Ma Yeye's ancestors to Burma after the Muslim Rebellion and their heroic resettlement afterward. I hoped to record Ma Yeye's narration about the history of his family line.

A Yunnanese Muslim friend in Mandalay had helped to arrange my visit. On the third day after my arrival in Kengtung, I walked from my guesthouse to Ma Yeye's house. On the way I passed four Shan temples, the tomb of the last Kengtung prince, Sao Sai Long, and then the Paleng Gate leading to the Chinese mosque a few hundred meters away. The military government has tried to repress the cultures of minority groups by destroying historical sites such as these, as well as by enforcing Burman education and encouraging official immigration of the Burman population to areas in which minority groups are concentrated. Nevertheless, these surviving structures and other cultural forms expressed through Shan language and religious beliefs still inscribe Kengtung's history into the everyday lives of the local inhabitants.

I found Ma Yeye's spacious wooden house situated in an alley near the mosque (Figure 4-2). Several framed posters of Quranic citations hung on the living room walls, along with a photo of the Kaaba centered and facing the garden.<sup>6</sup> "As-salaam alaikum" (peace be upon you), Ma Yeye greeted me in the traditional Islamic way. Though not a Muslim, I replied: "Wa alaikum assalaam" (may peace be upon you). After we sat down, a maid brought a cup of hot tea and a plate of dry dates. Ma Yeye said these dates were brought back by his eldest son from Saudi Arabia last Ramadan (about four months earlier).

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4. There are about two hundred Indian Muslim families in Kengtung.

5. Yeye means grandpa in Chinese. "Ma" is the most popular surname among the Yunnanese Muslims.

6. Kaaba is the holiest place in Islam, a black cube structure inside the al-Masjid al-Haram Mosque in the center of Mecca.



Figure 4–2. Panthay mosque in Kengtung

“How many children do you have?” I asked.

“Six—two sons and four daughters. They are all married. My eldest son has been in Saudi Arabia since 1980. He is a construction contractor. He graduated from Yangon University, majoring in business. His wife is from Maymyo [Pyin U Lwin] and is also a Yunnanese Hui. They come back

every year during the month of Ramadan. My second son and his family live in Yangon. I have a nephew who is a doctor in New York, another nephew, also a doctor, in Australia, two nieces in Singapore, and several relatives in Taiwan. They all come back from time to time.”

Ma Yeye’s transnational connections through family members’ and relatives’ emigrations were impressive. I had heard a number of similar cases. He went on to tell me the history of his origin. Ma Yeye was born in 1926 in Panglong, located below Kokang in the northern Wa region. Although no Yunnanese Muslims live there anymore, it was a significant place in the migration history of the Yunnanese Hui community in Burma. A Yunnanese Muslim scholar I interviewed a year earlier in Mandalay estimated that about 30 percent of Yunnanese Muslims in Burma today descend from Panglong.<sup>7</sup> Ma Yeye is the fourth generation, and after him there are three younger generations—seven generations in Burma. His great-grandfather, originally from Tengchong in Yunnan, led a group of fellow Muslims to Burma in the wake of the collapse of the Hui uprising. In 1875, they arrived in Panglong and founded their settlement. Ma Yeye related this migration history:

“Do you know about Du Wenxiu, the leader of the Hui Rebellion in Yunnan?<sup>8</sup> My great-grandfather was an officer under Du Wenxiu. His name was Ma Linyu.<sup>9</sup> He brought more than one hundred people with him from Tengchong, but only eighty-two survived to reach Panglong.<sup>10</sup> My great-grandfather requested the place, originally named Nanpha, for resettlement from a local Wa chief. The request was granted. He and his Hui fellows opened up the land and renamed it Panlong, meaning

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7. However, Panglong Hui tend to give a higher estimate—50 percent.

8. Du established the Dali Sultanate in 1856 to fight against the Qing government. By foregrounding the multiethnic frictions plaguing Yunnanese in the nineteenth century, Atwill argues against the simplified explanation in former studies that attributed the Muslim Rebellion to mere Han-Hui conflict. He looks into the impact of massive waves of Han immigration to Yunnan and the bias and aggression of the imperial government and the new Han settlers toward the non-Han groups for control of socioeconomic resources (Atwill 2006). For a history of the Muslim Rebellion see also Huang (1976) and Yang et al. (1994).

9. A booklet about Panglong history (*Panglong booklet*), written by a descendant of Yunnanese Muslims from Panglong, records the name as Ma Lingji (Ming 1998). Forbes recorded it as Ma Yin-ang in his book (Forbes and Henley 1997, 120). But in *Yunnan huizushi* (History of the Yunnanese Muslims), which was published in Kunming, it is also recorded as Ma Linyu (Yang et al. 1994, 201).

10. The *Panglong booklet* recorded the arrival of thirty-six people in Panglong (Ming 1998, 4).



‘moving to live together.’<sup>11</sup> Among the eighty-two people, there were three women. My great-grandfather married one of them. That was my great-grandmother; she later gave birth to two sons. One of them was my grandfather, Ma Meiting. Many other Hui men married women from Kokang or neighboring Wa and Shan villages. Within two years, more and more fellow Hui heard about the resettlement of my great-grandfather’s group in Panglong and came to join them. The total number soon expanded to several hundred.

“We are Chinese Muslims [*zhongguo huijiao*],<sup>12</sup> Muslims of Han nationality [*hanzu huijiao*]. Possibly with a bit of Arabian blood, but we are different from those Muslims in Xingjiang, the Uighur. We are Han Muslims. During the *hongqi baiqi* [red flags versus white flags] incident,<sup>13</sup> 90 percent of the Yunnanese Hui were slaughtered. The original size of the Hui Muslim community was hundreds of thousands; after the massacre only a few thousand were left.

“Panglong belonged to the Wa territory. The Hui Muslims got along with the Wa very well. My grandfather married two women. My grandmother was the first wife. The minor wife was a daughter of a local Wa chief. After the marriage, my grandfather became a [Wa] prince.”

“Was there also fighting with the Wa?” I asked.

“Well, the fighting, it was like this: We Chinese Muslims were culturally superior. We were talented at everything, especially business. But this incited jealousy from indigenous people and led to friction. Fighting occurred several times. Old people said a big one took place in 1926, the year I was born. The Wa chief wanted to chase us out of Panglong. But having established our households there, how could we leave? Consequently, we fought with them. Although the Wa outnumbered us, they were not as smart as we were. We had a trader, Wang Xuekai, who often traveled to Kengtung. He purchased modern weapons there—a kind of five-bullet

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11. “Panlong” was later changed to “Panglong” and then “Pannong,” but romanized, the place is mostly known as Panglong.

12. Grammatically it should be *zhongguo huijiaotu* (Chinese Muslims), but Yunnanese Muslims tend to simplify the term to *zhongguo huijiao* (Chinese Islam).

13. The Yunnanese Hui in Burma commonly use the term *hongqi baiqi* (red flag versus white flag) to refer to the Muslim uprising. The term was derived from the colors of the military flags used by the Mandurian troops (red) and Du Wenxiu’s troops (white) (Jing 1991, 155; Yang et al. 1994, 129).

gun [*wuziqiang*]<sup>14</sup>—and brought them back. You could insert five bullets into this kind of gun at one time. The fighting lasted for half a year. We won in the end. The Wa had to apologize to us. These indigenous people were backward.”

“What happened afterward?” I asked.

“After that, we had peace with the Wa. That was prior to the Second World War. But during the war, the situation changed. The Japanese invaded the region. They arrived in Kunlong, less than a day on foot from Panglong. The Chinese Nationalist government sent a delegate, surnamed Su, to organize a self-defense guard in Panglong. The guard leader was my fourth junior uncle, Ma Guanggui. My father was Ma Guanghua. The Japanese came and burned down our village. There were more than two hundred Hui households at that time. The guard was not able to beat them because the Japanese were regular forces. Panglong people were thus compelled to flee. Many escaped to Yunnan.

“It was 1942; I was sixteen years old. Our family fled to Kokang, then moved northward to Zhenkang and then arrived in Gengma. My parents sent me to Kunming to study. Some family members went to Baoshan, some to Dali and Shidian. One year after the Japanese surrendered, I set off on my way back to Burma. From Kunming I passed Baoshan, Mangshi, and then Wanding. I crossed the border and arrived in Kyugok and then made my way southward to Lashio and then eastward to Tangyan. My maternal grandmother was in Tangyan. Some family members also arrived in Tangyan, and we were reunited. I was married there in January 1952. Late that year my wife and I moved to Kengtung.”

“Why didn’t you go back to Panglong?” I asked.

“It had been raided by Li Wenhuan soon after the Second World War. You know of Li Wenhuan? He became the leader of the [KMT] Third Army later on; he was originally a bandit. After the war, many fellow Muslims had returned from Yunnan to Panglong, but before long they were dispersed to different places by the raid.<sup>15</sup> I was still in Kunming at that time.

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14. According to the *Panglong booklet*, the war started on November 25, 1926, and ended in late March 1927, lasting about four months (Ming 1998, 23–41).

15. According to Mu Dadie (the following narrator), the Panglong Hui’s flight after the Second World War was due to a series of inter-ethnic conflicts of which Li Wenhuan’s raid was a final calamity.

Since then, Panglong people have scattered to Lashio, Tangyan, Taunggyi, and Kengtung. No more Yunnanese Hui live in Panglong today.”

“What did you do while you were in Tangyan and Kengtung?” I asked.

“I transported goods back and forth between Tangyan and Mandalay. Meanwhile the family also made soy sauce to sell. After moving to Kengtung, I still worked transporting goods until 1963 or ’64 when Ne Win confiscated all shops [*shoupuzi*]. Consequently, there were no goods for transport. We lived solely on soy sauce making. My niece is still running the business.”

“I see. Business in food seems to be popular among Yunnanese,” I said.

“Yes. We were refugees; most countrymen didn’t have much capital for investment. The food business didn’t require much capital. Many Yunnanese made noodles. Kala used to call us *Kauk-swei wala*.”

“What does that mean?”

“Noodle men.<sup>16</sup> In return, we call the Kala *Kali wala*, meaning grooms.”

“How about the term ‘Panthay’? Do you call yourselves Panthay?” I asked.

“We are Chinese Muslims from Yunnan. ‘Panthay’ is the term used by the Burmese. We often call ourselves *musilin* [Muslim] or *huijiao* [believers of Islam].”

“What does ‘Panthay’ mean?”

“Don’t know. It must have been a derogatory term.”

“But young people [Yunnanese Muslims] have adopted it when speaking Burmese?”

“Yes.”

“Do you intermarry with Han people?”

“No, no intermarriages.”

“Why not?”

“Our beliefs are not the same. It is no good to have two religions in one family.”

“How about with Kala?”

“No, no intermarriages with Kala either.”

“Why not?”

“Our lifestyles [*shenghuo xiguan*] are different.”

“No intermarriages at all?”

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16. *Kauk-swei* is noodle in Burmese, and *wala* is people (mostly referring to laborers) in Hindi.

“Very few, very few cases. Also very few with the Han.”

“Do you have social or business interactions with Han or Kala?”

“Yes, some people have more; others have less. It varies from person to person. We are Chinese Muslims. We observe Chinese culture [*zhonghua wenhua*] centered on Confucianism, such as filial piety, propriety, diligence, and thrift. Most Hui parents register their children at both Burmese and Chinese schools. In addition, they send them to learn Arabic at mosques or hire private tutors to do the teaching at home. Hui children therefore have to work harder than the Han, as they have one more language to learn. In comparison, we Chinese Muslims are more liberal and gentle than the Indian Muslims, who are religiously more conservative and fundamental and secularly more cunning, quarrelsome, and untrustworthy. You have to be careful. You go to a Kala mosque, you may not be able to find your shoes after you have finished your prayer.”

I smiled at Ma Yeye’s comment about the Indian Muslims. I had repeatedly heard similar remarks from other Hui informants. Finally I asked Ma Yeye if he has been on Hajj pilgrimage. He replied:

“Yes, twice, in 1984 and 1990. My belief has helped me strengthen my faith. Allah is the True Lord [*zhenshu*]. Everything is predestined by him.”

Ma Yeye’s narration revealed an important part of Panglong history. Perhaps because of decades of chaotic situations and repeated migrations, only the generation over sixty years old knows the facts about Panglong history. Luckily, apart from oral transmission, a small booklet (*Panglong booklet*) written by a Panglong Hui outlining the history was printed in 1998 for distribution. This booklet records the founding of Panglong in 1875, the ambivalent relationship with the surrounding Wa that was characterized by reciprocity as well as warfare, the invasions by the British and Japanese, and the final flight of the Panglong people after the Second World War. Ma Yeye’s narration and the *Panglong booklet* share a similar ethnocentric tone that renders heroic the ancestors’ migration and resettlement experiences. Moreover, the booklet gives detailed accounts of several battles against the Wa that emphasize the remarkable prowess of the Panglong Hui.

The history of the Panglong Hui has seldom been explored. Yegar (1966) and Forbes (1986, 1988) are the two main scholars who have studied it. Their research was primarily drawn from colonial sources supplemented by a few interviews. Their works provide information on the

layout of Panglong in its early days, its population growth, and the economic dynamism of Yunnanese Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Following the Burmese, they used the term “Panthay” to refer to the Yunnanese Hui, but pointed out that this migrant group neither liked the name nor used it among themselves.<sup>18</sup> The origin of “Panthay” is uncertain. One speculation is that the term is connected to an old Burmese word for Muslim, “Pathi,” which was a corruption of “Parsi,” meaning Persian. Another speculation suggests that it was derived from a name on stone inscriptions of Bagan—“Pansi.” During the thirteenth century, the Mongols made three invasions from Yunnan to the Bagan Kingdom, and among the invading armies, some soldiers were Muslims from Central Asia (Maung Maung Lay 1999, 91–92). The term might have been used to refer to these troops.

With regard to the preferred name “Chinese Muslim,” it indicates the Yunnanese Hui’s double commitment to being Islamic and Chinese. In practice, they use the term to indicate their emigration origin and to differentiate themselves from other Islamic groups in Burma. Many senior Hui informants lay particular emphasis on their Chinese background by stating that they are Muslims of Han nationality (*hanzu huijiao*) or Muslims of the Han Empire (*hanchao huizi*). While the usage seems to suggest they have mixed up the ethnic classification created by the Chinese Communist government, it actually denotes a particular signification—their acknowledgment of the Hui’s acculturation regarding many Han values, everyday practices, and language.<sup>19</sup> Most of the Hui informants I have talked to are aware of the origins of their male progenitors from Central Asia. (Ma Yeye’s relation also admitted this historical fact.)

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17. The number of houses in Panglong in the 1890s was recorded as over 300 (Harvey 1933, 5; Scott 1901, 740) and increased to 740 (with a population of seven thousand) in 1927 (Harvey 1933, 99).

18. Some scholars even use “Panthay Rebellion” to refer to the Muslim revolt in Yunnan (e.g., Atwill 2006), which sounds alienating to the Yunnanese Hui.

19. The absorption of Chinese culture by the Hui has been going on for more than a thousand years in China (Gladney 2004, 101). Distinctive articulation of Islam and Chinese traditions is particularly shown in the writing of the *Han kitab* (the Chinese Islamic canons) undertaken by some Muslim intellectuals during the Ming and Qing periods. These Islamic texts are written in Chinese. Several writers, such as Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi, drew on neo-Confucian philosophy for explanation of Islam. Their language illustrates a grounding in Confucianism as well as the piety of Islamic religion (Lipman 1997, 72–85). The prefix of “Han” also appears among other minority groups in Yunnan that are considered to be sinicized, such as Han Baiyi, Han Lisu, and Han Jinghpaw.

In line with Ma Yeye, several Hui parents and grandparents also emphasized to me the value of Chinese culture. Despite their strong attachment to this culture, however, the religious difference represents a deep-seated boundary between them and the Han. While referring to the Han as *hanjiao* (believers of Han religion), they call themselves *huijiao*, often accompanied by emphasis on their dietary restrictions, especially pork and alcohol. In everyday life, they do not have much interaction with others, and intermarriages are rare.

Furthermore, Ma Yeye's narration reveals the importance of long-distance trade among the Panglong Hui, especially its critical role in the success of the battles against the Wa in 1926. Throughout history Yunnanese Muslims' economic prominence has been distinctive, although the Yunnanese Hui traders may not have been as numerous as the Han.<sup>20</sup> In addition to long-distance trade, Yunnanese Hui have engaged in transportation, food businesses, the gem trade, and hotels. While acknowledging the economic prominence of the migrant Yunnanese Muslims, Yegar and Forbes were pessimistic about the sustainability of the group's Islamic culture. Yegar claimed that the younger generation was withdrawing from the religion and traditions of their parents and wished to "assimilate with the Burmese Buddhist majority and to blur their peculiarities" (1966, 84). Forbes thought that "the Panthay community of Burma will disappear within one or two generations, either as a result of assimilation, or through migration to join the economically successful and culturally confident Yunnanese communities of northern Thailand" (1986, 392). However, their prediction has not come true. Despite the fact that a large number of

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20. Based on Western travelogues and colonial surveys (e.g., Archer 1892; Colquhoun 1900; Hanna 1931; Sladen 1870), both Yegar and Forbes describe Hui predominance in the long-distance trade between Yunnan and upper mainland Southeast Asia since the Yuan period (1277–1367). However, this view is challenged by Hill (1998, 50), Sun (2000, 223), and Giersch (2006, 159–86), who refer to the Han Chinese as the primary trading group, grounding their argument on their historical findings from Chinese, Burmese, and Tai sources. My field research among the contemporary Yunnanese migrants in Burma and Thailand is also in line with Hill, Sun, and Giersch. In northern Thailand the Muslim population constitutes less than 10 percent of the Yunnanese migrants (Chang 1999, 113). Informants, both Han and Muslim, stressed the Han as the largest group in Thai-Burmese transborder trade. The finding thus contradicts many earlier Western travelogues and colonial surveys that maintained that the Yunnanese Muslim traders were the major group. My interpretation is that the Muslim traders could have been more noticeable in some of the borderlands, especially during the time when the Muslim revolt took place, as they controlled a major part of the Yunnanese border trade.

Muslim youth have migrated to other countries (especially Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia), this outflow appears rather to provide the community with richer resources to found religious activities, as evidenced by initiatives providing free Islamic education in Burma and students sent to the Middle East for religious studies. The following narratives further explore this.

### **Mu Dadie in Pyin U Lwin**

Pyin U Lwin was established as a military post by the colonial British government in 1896 and was named Maymyo after Colonel May. It was also a summer resort for the colonial officers. During this period, the British brought approximately ten thousand Indians and five thousand Gurkhas (from Nepal) there for service.<sup>21</sup> The population of South Asian origin remains large today, around forty to fifty thousand.<sup>22</sup> They are mostly Muslims spread throughout different neighborhoods centered around mosques; there are fifteen mosques in total, including one built by the Yunnanese Muslim community. A good number of colonial buildings still remain throughout the town. This colonial legacy, the cool weather, and attractive coffee and flower plantations have maintained its popularity for tourists. In addition, the town is an important military base, housing two military schools—the Defense Services Academy and the Defense Services Institute of Technology.

The Yunnanese Muslim community in Pyin U Lwin has grown notably since the 1970s (Figures 4–3 and 4–4). I met Mu Dadie by coincidence at the Yunnanese Muslim mosque in late December 2008. Learning of my research, he was happy to share with me the organization of the Hui community and introduced several fellow men to me. He is a successful businessman and also a pious Muslim, devoting much time and money to his community. He told me that his great-great-grandfather escaped

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21. See Wikipedia “Pyin U Lwin”—<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maymyo>.

22. The figures were provided by Mu Dadie in 2008 (see following paragraphs). He said the total population of Pyin U Lwin is about 130,000.



Figure 4-3. Muslim graveyard in Pyin U Lwin



Figure 4-4. A Yunnanese Muslim's tomb in Pyin U Lwin



to Taunggyi after the Muslim revolt. He was born there in 1934, a fifth-generation Yunnanese Hui in Burma. He said that the Chinese mosque in Taunggyi, rebuilt in 1950, has a history of more than one hundred years. The Mus lived there for four or five generations before moving to Panglong during the Second World War because of the Japanese invasion. But before long the Japanese advanced to Panglong, and the family had to flee again. They escaped to Yunnan and stayed there for four years. After the war, the family moved back to Burma and first settled in Lashio. In 1949, they moved from Lashio to Pyin U Lwin—one of only four Yunnanese Muslim families there at the time, according to Mu Dadie—and remained there until 1954. After Pyin U Lwin, the family moved to Tangyan, where the Muslim community was much bigger. Mu Dadie got married there to a Panglong woman. Like Ma Yeye, he was engaged in transportation while living in Tangyan, but after the nationalization of the Burmese economy, he too was compelled to quit the business. In 1964, he and his family moved again to Pyin U Lwin and have stayed there ever since. In the late 1960s, the family took up machine knitting (*shenzhi*) and is still in the business today. Between the 1970s and 1980s, Mu Dadie purchased twenty-five knitting machines from Taiwan that were smuggled into the country via Thailand, partly by mule caravans from northern Thai-Burmese border points, and partly by boats from Ranong (in southern Thailand) to Yangon. Between 1967 and 1978, he also traded jade stones, which brought him a sizable income.

Since the late 1960s, more and more Yunnanese Muslims have moved to Pyin U Lwin, especially from Tangyan.<sup>23</sup> There are now more than 130 Yunnanese Hui families in Pyin U Lwin (and about 1,200 Yunnanese Han families). Informants said that Pyin U Lwin's cool weather is a major attraction for settlement. Moreover, it is located on the principal road leading to northern Shan State and is only sixty-seven kilometers from Mandalay.

In several conversations in 2008 and 2010, Mu Dadie talked to me at the Yunnanese mosque and his home about the development of the

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23. Because of increasing instability in the Tangyan area, many Yunnanese (both Hans and Muslims) moved out. An informant said that there were more than 400 Yunnanese Muslim families in Tangyan before 1970, but the number has now dropped to about 160.

Yunnanese Hui community in Pyin U Lwin and its religious life and education. He said:<sup>24</sup>

“Prior to 1972, we didn’t have our own place for prayer and had to pray at Kala’s mosques. In 1972, there were about forty Hui families.<sup>25</sup> We set up the Association of Mutual Help for Weddings and Funerals [*hunsang huzhuhui*], helping each other in the organization of these events, which took place at private homes. Every Friday some folks came to pray at my maternal uncle’s towel factory. In 1975, I purchased my maternal uncle’s place—one acre—and donated it for communal use. At that time my business was going quite well. We started to organize a basic Arabic class for our children there. I funded the class for the first ten years. However, we still didn’t have our official mosque. Although we and the Indians [Muslims] follow the same religion, our cultures are different. We take on different habits in daily life. We and the Indians don’t fit together well [*zongjuede gegeburu*]. It’s better that we have our own mosque for prayer following our increased population. In 1986, our community bought another piece of land facing the main road where there was a two-story house. We finally had our own mosque. There were over eighty Chinese Muslim families at that time. Imam Zhang was our first Imam. A few years later we built another two-story building next to the mosque. This new building was used for Arabic class, weddings, and funerals.”<sup>26</sup>

“My father-in-law was much concerned about the transmission of Islamic faith to the young generation and initiated the organization of a religious school. In 1990, the community founded Zhen Guang Awen-Xuexiao [The True Light Arabic School] at the two-story building [already used for Arabic class]. In the first year, there were only six or seven students and one teacher surnamed Ming, a graduate of a Muslim religious school in Yunnan. We registered the school as a student dormitory. Every month we have to report to the local government the number of students and pay one hundred kyat for each one. We use the second floor of the building for classes and the first floor for students’ accommodations. The school is only

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24. A space separates our different conversations in the excerpts that follow.

25. Another informant said there were ten Yunnanese Hui households in 1972.

26. A ceremonial hall was built in 1994 on the land that Mu Dadie donated to the Yunnanese Muslims’ Association of Mutual Help. Weddings and funerals have been organized there ever since.

for boys, mostly from Tangyan and Lashio. We provide free education, food, and lodging.”

“A complete education at the Pyin U Lwin School takes eight years. It was first sponsored by a Muslim businessman from Pyin U Lwin living in Taiwan, surnamed Zhao. Now it is funded by the Mings, who own the MK enterprise in Burma, which deals in the gem trade, cosmetics, textiles, clothing, plastic products, and electronic speakers.<sup>27</sup> The school has thirty-nine students and three full-time and two part-time teachers. The curriculum is composed of [Arabian] language learning and instruction of Islamic doctrines. We use textbooks from Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt in order to prepare our students for further studies in these countries in the future. The classes take place from eight to ten in the morning and two to three in the afternoon. The students also go to Chinese school between six and eight in the morning.”

“So far the school has had about thirty graduates in four years; not every year has seen new students or graduates. Around one-fourth of these graduates went abroad for further studies, the first batch in 1999, two to Syria and two to India. Later on we sent students to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. In Saudi Arabia we have a few Yunnanese Muslim folks living there. They pick up our students at the airport and provide other kinds of assistance during their stay. If the students abroad have financial difficulty, we help.

“Several students completed their studies and obtained a bachelor’s degree at universities in the Middle East, but some dropped out and became guest workers. Most students who graduated in these countries have been recruited by mosques in Taiwan. So far only two students returned to Burma to teach. One is the current principal of our Zhen Guang School. He studied in Egypt for two or three years, went to Japan for a few years [as a guest worker], and then came back to Burma. The current chair of the Muslim Association in Taiwan, Ma Haolong, also a Chinese Muslim from Burma, once apologized to me for their recruitment of our graduates. I told him it is not a problem because we are still able to find teachers here. But the situation in Taiwan is different; they don’t have local people devoted to Islamic studies and willing to serve at mosques.”

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27. Mu Dadie said that “MK” may be an abbreviation of the enterprise founder’s name—Ming Shaokun.

According to Mu Dadie and other informants there are two other Islamic schools organized by the Chinese Muslims in Burma—one in Mogok, one in Tangyan. The one in Mogok has the longest history. It was founded before the Second World War. But during the war, the school was compelled to close down and was not reopened until 1954. The one in Tangyan was established in 1967. Its operation was interrupted a few times because of financial difficulty and lack of teachers. Originally it provided eight years of studies, but that has dropped to four. The Pyin U Lwin School is the newest, but it has become the best organized among the three.

Apart from these three Islamic schools organized by the Chinese, there are far more Islamic schools run by the Indian Muslims. Some Yunnanese youth attended these schools, especially the ones in Meiktila, Pyawbwe, and Yangon, and later served at Chinese mosques as imams or instructors. That is why Mu Dadie told Mr. Ma not to worry about recruiting their graduates. Actually, long before the Hui of Pyin U Lwin set up Zhen Guang Arabic School, they had sent students to the Middle East. In 1987 they sent four students to Egypt. Two of them completed their studies at Al-Azhar University, and both are serving as imams at mosques in Taiwan.

The active faith of the Hui community of Pyin U Lwin is demonstrated by their shared support of Islamic education and communal activities. Around the mid-1990s, the Hui in Pyin U Lwin started to plan a new mosque to be built on the location of the old one, but it took a long time to get their application approved by the government. In 2000, they tore down the old house and began the construction. However, policies can change abruptly in Burma, and the government called a halt to the work a year later. Informants said that, typical of discrimination against Muslims, they were not allowed to resume the construction for five or six years. In the interim, they had to use classrooms for communal worship. The new mosque was completed in late 2008.

During my two visits in 2008 and 2010, I observed the mosque packed with people (both young and old) for the noon prayer each Friday, except once when an old Hui passed away in Mandalay early one Friday morning. Upon receiving the information by phone, many Hui in Pyin U Lwin organized car pools and went together to the bereaved family. Informants told me later that it has been a tradition that Hui community members support one another whenever possible. By mutual participation in funerals, weddings, and religious activities, they have cultivated close ties among themselves. Moreover, widespread webs of kith and kin have further cemented their relationships via intra-marriage.

Hui informants in upper Burma and Yangon commonly remarked that the Chinese Muslims in the country are a small minority and that they need to be cohesive. While their religion has played an essential role in fostering this cohesion, the feature of being Chinese is another indivisible element in their community identity, as we can see from the narratives given by Ma Yeye and Mu Dadie. In practice, they alternately use features of “Chinese” and “Islam” to distinguish themselves from other Muslim groups and the Yunnanese Han. Specifically, they underline their Islamic belief when making reference to the Han, and they emphasize their Chinese culture in relation to the Indian and other Muslim groups.<sup>28</sup> While personal friendship across these socio-ethnic boundaries exists case by case, there is little interaction between the Yunnanese Hui and the other groups.

Being a migrant group with a religion that is discriminated against in Burma, the Yunnanese Hui are aware of their doubly marginalized status. Intriguingly, they have drawn on these two characteristics for expansion of their community connections with other Chinese societies and countries in the Middle East. Mu Dadie said that in the past thirty years or so, the Yunnanese Muslim communities have worked hard to build connections with Arab countries in order to open channels of religious studies for their youth. A distinctive example is the effort made by the main owner of the MK enterprise, Ming Shaokun, a successful Panglong Hui businessman who grew up in Tangyan, later moved to Pyin U Lwin, and then migrated to Thailand, where he has achieved economic success. Many of his siblings and relatives still live in Pyin U Lwin, Mandalay, and Yangon, and help to run the MK Corporation. The Mings have maintained good relationships with ambassadors of several countries of the Middle East, in Bangkok and Yangon, as well as with Burmese officials in these two capitals. Ming Shaokun himself was invited once by the royal family of Saudi Arabia to Mecca. Such relationships have facilitated the visa application of many Hui students to these countries.

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28. In turn, the Han make the same distinction, often accompanied by negative remarks about the Hui as being troublesome and shrewd, which are the exact remarks that the Hui make about the Indians. This phenomenon of Han stereotyping the Hui also exists in China (see, e.g., Gillette 2000; Gladney 1996). I have not yet had an opportunity to learn about the Indian Muslims' perception of the Yunnanese Hui.

## Yunnanese Hui in the Middle East and Taiwan

Several Hui religious specialists from Burma who finished their studies in the Middle East have been recruited to work in Taiwan. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the transnational networks operated through the preaching of Islam (*Da'wah*) among the Yunnanese Hui from Burma, I conducted several interviews<sup>29</sup> between 2009 and 2010 in Taiwan with Imam Shan and Deputy Imam Bao at Taichung Mosque (in Taichung), Imam Liu at Lunggang Mosque (in Chungli), and Imam Ma<sup>30</sup> at the Cultural Mosque (in Taipei). Imam Shan and Imam Liu (both from Tangyan) completed their studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt; Deputy Imam Bao (from Kengtung) graduated from the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia; and Imam Ma (from Pyin U Lwin) graduated from Ahmad Kaftaru University in Syria. I asked them to make comparisons between their experiences in Burma, the country of their studies abroad, and Taiwan. Their answers repeatedly underscore their core identification constituted by a Chinese background and Islamic faith. While devoting themselves to the propagation of Islam and acknowledging the origin of the religion in the Middle East, they stress their self-distinction—their Asian background and Chinese culture—from the people of the Middle East. Imam Shan's narrative given on August 28, 2009, is illustrative:

“[Imam Liu and I] went to Egypt, to the Al-Azhar University [in 1987] as students.<sup>31</sup> The elder generation [of our community back in Burma] thought that it was the best university for Islamic studies. We only went there for studies, not for migration. The country has its way of living that is different from ours. Although we and the people there share the same religion, we couldn't adapt to their lifestyle. We are Han, following Islam. We have been nourished by both Confucianism and Islam. Nevertheless, these two cultures share similar values. Confucianism emphasizes loyalty [*zhong*], filial piety [*xiao*], benevolence [*ren*], love [*ai*], trust [*xin*], justice [*yi*], peace [*he*], and harmony [*ping*], which are also emphasized in Islam.

29. Moreover, I have participated in their Ramadan activities since 2009 and interviewed several other Yunnanese Muslim migrants from Burma and Thailand who have settled in Taiwan.

30. Imam Ma worked in Lunggang Mosque as an instructor of Arabic prior to his promotion to be the imam of the Cultural Mosque (*wenhua qingshensi*) in Taipei in 2010.

31. Actually they had to study at a high school for two years before entering the university.

Basically if you have learned Confucianism, you have no difficulty accepting Islam. Hence, we are better suited to go to Chinese societies to preach, such as Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Burma has enough people for this task, but these Chinese-speaking societies are in need of such specialists. We have the obligation to carry out the work. Our students in Burma must learn Chinese, Arabic, and English in preparation for their future preaching abroad.”

“Why do they have to learn English?” I asked.

“All international forums on religious studies are conducted in English. You must know the language in order to communicate with other people, exchange ideas, and build up international connections. I have attended such an occasion in Malaysia. That is my certificate.” He pointed to a framed document on the wall.

“Is it necessary to go to the Middle East for Islamic studies? Or is it sufficient to do it in Burma?” I asked.

“You must go to the Middle East, to any of the orthodox universities in order to upgrade yourself to an international standard.”

“With whom did you associate mostly while studying in Egypt?”

“Primarily with students from China, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Egypt has its distinctive culture and tradition to which we cannot really assimilate. It’s like countries of Africa; they have their particular cultures. But in order to learn the Arabic language, we also needed to mingle with local people,” Imam Shan said.

The other three interviewees made similar remarks highlighting their Chinese and Islamic identification. Another recurrent point in their narratives dwells upon food preferences, which illustrate their difference from Arab Muslims while displaying an affinity with Chinese and other Asian people. On August 8, 2009, Imam Ma related his experience of having local food in Syria on the very first day of his and his friend’s arrival:

“It was my first experience abroad. A friend in Japan had contacted a Muslim association to send people to pick us up at the airport. At the Damascus airport we were questioned for a couple of hours by the customs officials because they had never seen a Burmese passport. Luckily those Syrian friends who came to pick us up waited for us. We were very hungry, and they took us to eat at a restaurant. The first thing brought to us was a bowl of yogurt, pure yogurt, very sour, no sugar added. We couldn’t take it on an empty stomach. I asked them: ‘Rice, rice, where is rice?’ They

said: 'Wait a moment.' We waited and waited. I asked again: 'Rice, rice, where is rice?' Then they brought a dish with many small pieces, each wrapped in grape leaves. I asked again: 'Where is rice?' They said: 'Inside the leaves.' Such small pieces! What was inside was not rice."

After seven or eight months, Imam Ma and his friend decided to move out of the university dormitory. "We couldn't stand the food provided at the canteen anymore. It was too greasy for us. There was no rice. We rented a room and moved out. We started to cook our own food. But we didn't have a rice cooker and had to cook rice on the stove. The first time I burned the rice. Both the rice and the pot turned black. Luckily I learned the skill of gradually controlling the fire. Meanwhile we got to know more and more friends from China. They are from different provinces, including Yunnan. We visited each other. This made our lives more cheerful."

Although the pursuit of Islamic faith and knowledge was the main goal of these Yunnanese Hui in the Arab countries, they were conscious of cultural differences. The theme of food recurred in each of the four interviewees' narration. Imam Liu mentioned that the local people ate much more meat than vegetables, and that he and his Hui friends from Burma had difficulty finding varieties of green vegetables in Cairo. Deputy Imam Bao said there was no entertainment in Saudi Arabia, but he enjoyed making tea with his Chinese friends. Hence food became a key differentiating factor between them and the local people from the very beginning. At some point, they all sought to cook their own food in order to improve their lives. At their leisure, they explored connections, primarily with Chinese and other Asian students who all ate rice as a staple food. Gathering for meals became the major form of social activity that helped enhance their dull student lives. Although they also made contact with local people (mostly classmates), they confessed there was little interaction.

After their graduation, they were immediately recruited to work in Taiwan. Imam Shan arrived in Taiwan in 1996 and Imam Liu in 1997.<sup>32</sup> Since their arrival they have particularly stressed the importance in their religious work of providing Islamic education for the children of their communities. They and Imam Ma and Deputy Imam Bao work hard to address this task by organizing classes of Arabic learning and Islamic

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32. The first Yunnanese imam coming from Burma to Taiwan was Imam Chen at Kaohsiung Mosque, who arrived in 1991. Deputy Imam Bao arrived in 2003 and Imam Ma in 2004.



doctrines for different age-groups at their mosques. Moreover, Imam Shan is keen to introduce Islam to non-Muslim young people at universities via invitational lectures and youth camps. A few Hui followers of Lunggang Mosque commented that prior to the arrival of these Hui religious specialists from Burma, the Islamic communities in Taiwan were declining because of the lack of Islamic education for the Hui children. The devotion of these religious experts has helped energize new development of the Islamic communities in this non-Islamic society.

While working in Taiwan, these Yunnanese Islamic experts have maintained close ties with the Hui communities in Burma via exchange of news. The Hui group in Burma has become the major source for Islamic experts in Taiwan. In turn, Taiwan has been an attractive immigration destination for many Yunnanese migrants in Burma. The Yunnanese Hui are a majority group among the Muslims in Taiwan. The community of Lunggang Mosque in Chungli is especially distinctive, composed of more than two hundred Muslim households that have migrated from Burma and Thailand during different periods since the 1950s.<sup>33</sup> Many Yunnanese men in Taiwan still look for marriage partners from Burma or Thailand.

In recent years the Yunnanese Muslims from Burma have extended their religious work to Singapore. One of Imam Ma's friends, also surnamed Ma, who was studying with him in Pyin U Lwin and Syria, also came to Taiwan as an instructor of Arabic after graduation. A few years later, he married a Yunnanese Muslim woman from Burma who was working in Singapore. After marriage they settled in Singapore, and Mr. Ma was recruited by an Islamic association to work among Chinese Muslims, especially those from Burma.

While aware of their doubly marginalized status as Chinese and Muslims in Burma, the Yunnanese Hui maintain a focus on foreign countries and have successfully extended their Hui networks abroad by emphasizing these two features. Applying Peter Mandaville's interpretation of Islamic

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33. The Yunnanese Muslim community in Chungli, Taiwan, is a very interesting case for research on ethno-religious identity (Kimura 2006; Ma 2011). During the two KMT evacuations of 1953–1954 and 1961, over ten thousand Yunnanese arrived in Taiwan from Burma. Among them, a small minority were Muslims. In 1963 a mosque was built next to the military dependents' village of Chungchen in Chungli for the Yunnanese Muslims, a precursor of the present Lunggang Mosque.

transnationalism (2001), we can say that the diasporic Yunnanese Muslims' traveling has resulted in their translocality, characterized by repeated encounters with different cultural elements and groups of people, as well as by their ongoing reinterpretation and adherence to their Islamic faith and ethnic identity. Whether in Burma, countries of the Middle East, or Taiwan, the Yunnanese Muslims embrace their identification pertaining to Chinese and Islamic traditions, two cultures they see as separate yet compatible. It is interesting to note how these two traditions interact with each other in different places. While promoting their Islamic faith by studying in Arab countries, these Hui interviewees used their Chinese background to connect with ethnic Chinese and other Asian people in their social lives. Yet, while their arrival in Taiwan may be seen as deepening a connection with their Chinese roots, their religious work serves the propagation of Islam. Intriguingly, these two fundamental elements alternately display their prominence in different contexts and highlight the flexibility and dynamism of the Yunnanese Muslims of Burma while simultaneously showing their marginality and encountered frictions. Underlining what Homi Bhabha calls an in-between or interstitial subjectivity (1996), they see themselves, no matter where they are, as a minority group different from others. In particular, I observe that this marginal feeling is distinctive among the Yunnanese Hui guest workers (especially among the women) in non-Muslim countries. The story of Shuli in the following section illuminates this phenomenon.

### **Shuli in Japan**

Economic immigration is another common means whereby connections are extended abroad among the Yunnanese Muslims of Burma. Taiwan has been a favored destination for both the Han and Muslims, as it is a Chinese society and relatively affluent.<sup>34</sup> The Yunnanese migratory movement

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34. Whereas the earlier evacuees retreated from Burma to Taiwan (in 1953–1954 and 1961) for political reasons, the later arrivals are economic migrants. In the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a wave of Chinese migration from Burma to Taiwan to escape the repressive Ne Win regime, but most of these immigrants were Guangdong and Fujian descendants (Chai 2006). Meanwhile, a great number of Yunnanese migrants fled from upper Burma to northern Thailand (Chang 1999).

from Burma to Taiwan intensified between 1985 and 2005, a period when the Taiwanese economy was much in need of foreign laborers. Most of them arrived in Taiwan via Thailand, as Guoguang's story reveals (chapter 3). Prior to 1995, immigration to Taiwan for the Chinese overseas was not too difficult. The Yunnanese migrants who moved to Taiwan before 1995 were easily granted Taiwanese citizenship. After obtaining citizenship, many of them applied for their relatives in Burma or Thailand to join them. Apart from permanent emigrants, many Yunnanese in Burma went abroad as guest workers for short periods. Their major destinations include Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and Australia. Informants said that Taiwan and Japan were the most desired countries before 2005. The salary in Japan is especially attractive, but they can only work there clandestinely. The chance of obtaining legal residency there is very slim. Those who want to go there have to pay large service fees to the brokers who help arrange a tourist visa, and they either depart directly from Burma or indirectly from Thailand.<sup>35</sup> A cheaper way is to go to Taiwan first as a student and then apply for a Japanese tourist visa in Taiwan. Shuli used this strategy and worked in Tokyo for four years.<sup>36</sup>

The number of male Yunnanese working in Japan is much higher than that of their female counterparts. Japan is neither an Islamic nor a Chinese society. Moreover, it is farther away than Taiwan and other neighboring countries and is thus considered more risky for women to travel and work there. In Shuli's case, she had two elder brothers already working there who could assist her. While conducting fieldwork in Pyin U Lwin among the Yunnanese Hui, I noticed that almost every man between his late twenties and age fifty had worked in Japan. Several male informants confirmed that during the peak period from 1990 to 2000, nine male Hui out of ten went to Japan as illegal laborers. They said that in general the ratio of Yunnanese Muslim men venturing abroad as guest workers is higher than that of their Han counterparts because the former group has fewer business opportunities in Burma owing to their religion's ban on the practices of usury and alcohol making, both common sources of income for Yunnanese migrants.

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35. The service fee could go as high as two hundred thousand baht in the mid-1990s, according to informants.

36. I got to know Shuli's fourth elder sister first through Ae Maew's introduction. She is settled in Taiwan and attended university with Ae Maew.

Moreover, Pyin U Lwin is a hill town with an agriculturally based economy. Men need to go outside the area for economic development.<sup>37</sup>

Shuli has three brothers and four sisters. All three brothers have had experience working abroad. Her eldest brother has been in Japan since 1986,<sup>38</sup> and the second elder brother was there for six years (1988–1994). Both worked in Bangkok for a few years before going to Japan. Brokers helped purchase Thai passports and Japanese visas for them. Shuli's third elder brother worked in Hong Kong for two years in the mid-1990s. Among the girls, only her fourth elder sister and Shuli herself have worked abroad. Both went to Taiwan as students, respectively in 2001 and 2002. This sister completed her university studies and then stayed on illegally for four years before obtaining legal status in 2009.<sup>39</sup> Shuli stayed in Taiwan for only half a year. She then used her student status to apply for a tourist visa to Japan, where she stayed for four years as an underground laborer. In our first meeting in late 2008 in the courtyard of her house, she told me about her experiences in Taiwan and Japan:

“After arriving in Taiwan, I felt very much discriminated against. Classmates looked down on me, like I was from some very backward place. I hated that kind of feeling. My family was not poor in Burma. My parents always provided for us. But in Taiwan, I encountered many difficulties. The first time I entered an elevator, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to take a bus, or where to find *qingzhen* food.<sup>40</sup> I could only eat vegetarian dishes at the beginning. Once I bought and ate a package

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37. Geographical location also affects the decision of where to go for work abroad. For example, Kengtung is near Thailand, and many people there go to Thailand for work. Many people living in the northern border area go to China to seek their fortune. Those in Yangon and southern Burma first consider going to Singapore or Malaysia.

38. This eldest brother married a Yunnanese Hui woman in Japan. They have two children born there. The couple hired a lawyer to make a petition based on the fact that their children were born and raised in Japan. The children speak only Japanese and have been acculturated to the society, and therefore it would not be possible for the children to return to Burma. In 2009, all the family members finally were granted legal status based on humanitarian concerns.

39. A large number of ethnic Chinese from Burma stay in Taiwan illegally. In 2008, many of them requested that the Taiwanese government grant them citizenship based on their long residency in Taiwan and difficulty in returning to Burma. Most people claimed that they did not have Burmese citizenship and had purchased fake passports to come to Taiwan. A portion of the applicants were granted legal status in 2009.

40. *Qingzhen* food means purified Muslim dishes (halal food); for the concept of *qingzhen* see Gladney (1996, 7–14).

of instant noodles, only to discover it was flavored with pork. Everything was new to me.

“Classmates looked down on all the students from Burma. They saw me as Burmese. I couldn’t stand them taking advantage of my compatriots from Burma [*miandian tongbao*] and once quarreled with them fiercely. I told them: ‘We didn’t come to Taiwan on foot, but by airplane. We are here to study, paying the same tuition fees as you do. We are poorer, but so what? Have we asked for money from you? If you don’t apologize to me and my friends, I’ll appeal to the military instructors.’<sup>41</sup> Finally they apologized to us Burmese [*xiang women miandianren daoqian*].

“I didn’t like Taiwan and wanted to go back to Burma. But I didn’t want to return with nothing. I didn’t even have money to buy a plane ticket. My two elder brothers were working in Japan, so I decided to go there. With Burmese status, I needed to show my bank account when applying for a Japanese tourist visa. My eldest brother contacted one of his friends in Taiwan to lend me one hundred thousand NT. The money was put in my account book in order to show the Japanese consulate. After obtaining the visa, I immediately returned that money to my brother’s friend.

“In Japan, I rented a room with two other Yunnanese Muslim roommates. The rent and the bills for water and electricity amounted to about one hundred thousand yen per month. We agreed that each of us would put fifty thousand yen toward a common fund for payment of the rent and other communal costs every month. Water and electricity fees were not much because we all worked outside the whole day and only returned for sleep. But some roommates appropriated the money from the common fund. We had agreed that it was only for common spending, not for personal usage. During those years some roommates took advantage of others, although not everyone did. When such a problem occurred, I couldn’t say anything directly to the wrongdoer. I had to think about the consequences. Very often, I just had to swallow.”

On another occasion, while we cooked together in the kitchen, Shuli said: “Going abroad was a big lesson for me. I was naive before I left Burma. I used to spend money carelessly. But while working in Japan, I learned how hard it is to make money. Most guest workers worked twelve

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41. There are military instructors in each school above the junior high level in Taiwan. This has been a legacy from the Nationalist government since the reign of Chiang Kai-shek.

hours a day; I worked fifteen hours. I slept only three hours a day. I cut my hair short because I had no time to take care of it. After returning home from work, I quickly took a shower and washed my hair. I didn't even have time to dry it. I was always tired after work. I was very slim. Well, I wanted to make money. I knew that was my goal. I couldn't expect my family to support me while I was in Japan. . . .

"I worked at restaurants. I washed dishes. The pots were greasy with lard. I had to wash them. I washed, washed, washed. There was no other way to avoid touching pork and lard. The salary was 850 yen per hour at the beginning. Later on I worked as a waitress and cashier, and the salary was raised to 900 yen per hour, and then 1,000 yen. On Sunday the pay was higher, 1,200 yen per hour. . . .

"In the beginning I often ate plain rice mixed with butter. Gradually I also ate other kinds of food, except pork. It was too difficult to get strict *qingzhen* food. It was not possible to fast either. I had to work almost every day. I didn't go to the mosque, and I didn't pray each day. Under such circumstances, I realized the most important thing was my conscience. I didn't take advantage of other people or do bad things to anyone. My heart was clean.

"After four years, I was too tired to stay on. I thought it was time to go home. I reported myself to the police and then returned to Burma. Yet, I had great difficulty in readjusting to the lifestyle here at the beginning. I worked all day long in Japan, fifteen hours a day. But here in Pyin U Lwin, I had nothing to do. All I did was eat, sleep, and watch satellite television. I felt as if I were going crazy with this idle lifestyle. I told my family I wanted to go abroad again. But my family didn't allow it. They wanted me to get married and settle down. Finally, I managed to open this bakery. I hired one Indian baker and several Burmese workers. The business is OK. I no longer spend money carelessly. It is sad if you don't have money.

"I have to supervise the workers. Those Burmese workers give you a headache. They have been doing the same job for a long time. But still, you have to repeat the directions to them every day. They are like robots."

"Would you consider marrying a Burmese or Indian?" I asked.

"Definitely not. Our living standards and habits are very different. It would be too difficult to live together. Marriage is not only for me. I have to think of my parents and other siblings. It is sad for us Muslim girls, for our marriage circle is rather small. Muslim men can marry non-Muslim

women and demand their wives convert to Islam. But we Muslim women could hardly do so. The Han men will not convert to Islam for their wives. That is why the number of non-married Chinese Muslim women is high.<sup>42</sup> Well, financially I'm independent. Whether I get married or not is not so much a problem. However, I know that an unmarried woman does not have a social footing in a Muslim community."

Shuli is certainly a capable businesswoman. She runs her shop efficiently. She still lives with her mother and third elder brother. This brother married a Han girl a few years ago; she converted to Islam before marriage. Shuli said this sister-in-law was very smart and mastered recitation of the Koran after studying Arabic for half a year with a tutor at home. However, this sister-in-law did not like the confinements imposed on a married woman in terms of social life, and she still liked going out with friends a lot. According to Shuli, although her mother was not strict, the sister-in-law did not feel she fit into the family, and she finally separated from her husband. "There are several similar cases of divorce. Islam is more conservative than other religions," Shuli remarked. Since returning from Japan, Shuli joins her mother for five prayers every day.

Despite her economic independence, Shuli acknowledged family pressure pushing her to get married. So far, Shuli and her fourth elder sister in Taiwan, both over thirty, are unmarried. Her sister in Taiwan confided to me that there have been several Han, Indian, and Burmese wooers for her and Shuli, but they have not accepted them. Among their own folk, they have not found suitable candidates either. While Shuli's story illustrates her economic agency, it also reflects her marginality as a Burmese national abroad, a Chinese migrant in Burma, and a Muslim woman wherever she is. Accordingly, multiple strands of influences and frictions generated from sociocultural, religious, and economic interactions affect the formation of her subjectivity and define her standing in different contexts. Her narratives illuminate how far she managed to resist various kinds of external demands and how she negotiated in order to hold on to her integrity as a Chinese Muslim woman in Burma and abroad. In the face of circumstances that compelled her to act against Islamic commands, she was able to locate herself in her conscience. This demonstrates a strong inner force that helps her combat her marginality when necessary.

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42. I do not have the figure; however, most Yunnanese Muslim women I know are married.

On the other hand, her constant resistance to marrying ethnic others points to her desire to cling to her ethno-religious and gender marginality. She was aware that once she betrayed this marginality, she would likely also lose self-esteem and the esteem of her family and her community. She told me there are a few such cases of outside marriage among her relatives, and they are typically sources of shame for the family. Women who marry out of their community are not able to gain social recognition from either the Hui or their husbands' community. "Such marriages are tragedies. I prefer to live without getting married if I cannot find a suitable one," she lamented. Having interviewed Yunnanese Muslims in Mandalay, Yangon, Kengtung, Taunggyi, Pyin U Lwin, Lashio, and Tachileik, I find marriage endogamy steadfast among the group, an attitude that has been an essential factor contributing to the maintenance of their Yunnanese Hui identity.

The stories told by Ma Yeye, Mu Dadie, several Yunnanese Islamic specialists in Taiwan, and Shuli highlight the dynamism of the Yunnanese Hui of Burma. Being marginal does not mean being passive. Like the Yunnanese Han in Burma, the Yunnanese Hui have been very mobile and have successfully gained a measure of economic security and social stability. Their travels serve a range of purposes, including education, religious missions, employment, and marriages. Whatever the purpose, all their movement contributes to the expansion of the Yunnanese Hui's transnational nexuses. In effect, Islam, which is embedded in their beliefs and practices, has compounded the marginality of their allochthonous status while making their intra-interaction coherent. This positive-cum-negative phenomenon originating from a group's common religion is not seen among the Han. Moreover, the overlap of kinship, religious, and ethnic networks among the Hui is distinctive.

In sum, Islam, Chinese background, and intra-group marriages are fundamental elements that distinguish the Yunnanese Hui from other groups in different contexts. These elements have also facilitated their circulation across a wide range of places and interconnection with fellow members. Certainly, there are individual variations in terms of migration experiences and religious observance in daily life. Many young Hui confided to me that they do not observe five prayers a day, be they in Burma or abroad. I have also heard about drinking, gambling, and family violence problems. Nevertheless, the Yunnanese Muslim identity prevails among the group's members.



The Muslim Rebellion in Yunnan and subsequent waves of flight have been inscribed in the group members' social memory. Moreover, the Burmese government's discriminatory policies toward the Muslim minorities and a spate of anti-Muslim attacks since 2012 have fueled a feeling of persecution in this community. Although the Chinese Muslims were not directly targeted in these riots, many Yunnanese Muslims I came into contact with in Yangon, Mandalay, and Lashio in October 2013 expressed their deep fear that the situation might worsen. In the wake of these aggressive incidents, they have cautiously reduced their public religious visibility by avoiding Islamic greetings among themselves when they are outdoors and curtailing the call for prayers amplified over microphones from mosques.

In comparison, emigration among the Hui has been much more intensive than that of the Han. In the mid-1960s, the Hui population in Burma was about ten thousand to fifteen thousand (Yegar 1966, 83). The number has not increased much, possibly because of continuous migration abroad. Whether the current stream of sectarian violence will accelerate the emigration rate among the population remains to be seen. What can be discerned is that the group's cohesion has not been weakened despite its members' ongoing mobility. In contrast, it has assisted them to respond to "encounters across difference" (Tsing 2005) and to strengthen their feeling of displacement and ethnic identity. (Deputy Imam Bao's and Grandma Ma's words about having no home quoted at the beginning of the chapter reflect this sentiment.) Concretely, their double attachments as Muslims and as Chinese have contributed to the heterogeneity of Muslim culture in Burma as well as in the world. Such a phenomenon highlights the duality of the Islamic world, which is characterized by a religious universalism that pursues a global Muslim community (*umma*) and by numerous ethno-cultural traits as asserted by scholars of Islamic studies (e.g., Gilmartin 2005; Launay 1992; Nasr 2002; Said and Sharify-Funk 2003; Zaman 2005). While this conjuncture of universalism and particulars has existed harmoniously among different Muslim communities in Burma for centuries, the society requires a greater degree of tolerance and understanding across today's ethno-religious boundaries.

