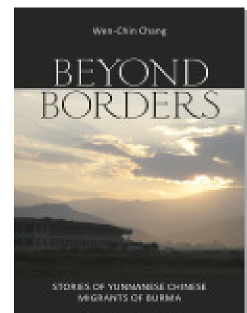
6. Transcending Gendered Geographies: Yunnanese Women Traders



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6

Transcending Gendered Geographies

Yunnanese Women Traders

Do not cut grape vines for firewood. / Do not marry off your daughter to a muleteer. / Bride [of a muleteer] on the 30th eve, / her husband leaves at dawn of the first [the next day].

—quoted in Wang and Zhang 1993, 220–21[1]

Eldest sister came home, tears in her eyes. / Sullenly she related her stories to her parents. / Do not marry your daughter to a man of Heshun. / During a period of ten years, the couple is together for half a month.

—*Yangwentun xiaoyin*; quoted in Dong 2000, 30[2]

I call my son once again, / Listen to my words carefully. / It is hard to raise you; / Aged only seventeen, eighteen, or nineteen, / You are setting off on a long journey. / See you again perhaps in three or four years. (ibid.)[3]

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1. This is a muleteer song (*ganmage*); the author is unknown. The Chinese lyrics are: "Kanchai mokan putaoteng / Yangnyu mojia ganmaren / Sanshi wanshang zuoxifu / Chuyi zaoshang tichumen." The lyrics vary slightly from place to place.

2. Heshun is a border township of Tengchong, famous for the exodus of its men to Burma for trade. *Yangwentun xiaoyin*, a manuscript compiled around the Xianfeng era (1850–1861 CE) during the Qing dynasty, was kept at the library of Heshun (Dong Ping 2000, 45). It records many local poems telling stories of separation of family members due to men's economic engagement. The Chinese lyrics of the quoted poem are: "Dajie huijia lei wangwang / Choumei kulian su dieniang / Younyu mojia heshunxiang / Shinian shougua banyueshuang."

3. The Chinese lyrics are: "Jiao yisheng wodeer / Xiting genyou / Feirongyi / Fuyangni / Shi qi ba jiu / Zong quyuan / Yizhike / Sinian sanqiu."

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These are a few old songs and poems in Yunnan that vividly describe the stressful situation faced by women left behind by their husbands and sons for the sake of long-distance trade. In contrast to the mobility of Yunnanese men engaging in this type of trade, Yunnanese women[4] were traditionally confined to domestic life and restricted from the public sphere (*buke paotouloumian*). Men were considered the active participants in economic undertaking, although women (especially those in the lower class) in practice also contributed to the family income by weaving, making clothes, raising animals, and working on farms (Fei and Chang 1948; Hsu 1967; Johnson 1975; Topley 1975). While men were away, many of them also set up parallel homes in different places (Dong 2000). Many Yunnanese women were oftentimes separated from their husbands and sons and possibly in sole charge of household responsibilities. It is a pity that historical records do not leave us information about women's life stories. However, we may presume that married life was tough for them.

Differing from this conventional picture of restricted women's movement in Yunnan, migrant Yunnanese women in Burma have generally been compelled to be mobile as well as economically active in order to sustain everyday family life in the face of numerous vicissitudes. My field data show that in many cases women are the actual household managers, as their husbands are unable to provide economic support because of military engagement, loss in trade, or drug addiction. In contrast to the prominence of men's military activities and engagement in the large-scale mule caravan trade, the women's life experiences are less visible and easily overlooked. Nevertheless, these women have played an essential role in the maintenance of their families by participation in different types of economic activities, including long-distance trade, thereby breaking the conventional restraint on women's movement. These women straddle household and economic undertakings and the gap between restrictive gendered ideologies and economic responsibilities. While earning personal autonomy, their economic practices also generate familial tensions and feelings of ambivalence in their self-identity.

In line with the findings about women traders in a range of places in Asia, Africa, America, and Europe presented in the volume edited by Linda

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4. In line with other chapters, I only refer to Yunnanese Han and Yunnanese Muslim women here.

J. Seligmann, the Yunnanese women traders in Burma are also situated "within complicated webs of social ties, institutional structures, and economic forces" (Seligmann 2001, 3) that embrace intricate factors ranging from kinship habitation, gendered ideologies, an oppressive political system, insecure socioeconomic conditions, and borderland location. Consistent with Tsing's interpretation (2005), interaction of these factors entails frictions that either facilitate or obstruct these women's participation in economic pursuit. Consequently, they lead to an ongoing process of shaping and reshaping "gendered geographies of power" (Mahler and Pessar 2001) that accommodate these women's business acumen, frustration, and pain.

How did the women carry out their economic undertakings during the grievous Ne Win regime? How have they been able to grasp new economic opportunities since 1988? How do they identify themselves as women traders and differentiate themselves from their male counterparts? And what are the tensions and creative forces involved in their mobility? The following stories highlight the economic lives of a few female traders and illuminate their agency in the face of multifarious ruptures—political, economic, and sociocultural. Their narratives not only provide insights into their lives but also into an important aspect of the social history of the Yunnanese migrants in Burma.

Qiu Dajie

In January 2006, after learning about my upcoming trip to northern Shan State's capital, Lashio, to study the border trade, a Yunnanese friend in Taiwan suggested I visit Qiu Dajie.[5] I took the same route from Mandalay to Lashio by bus as I had during my first visit in 2000. The bus was still full of passengers and goods, and the road was crowded with many trucks overloaded with import-export merchandise. Lashio is a bustling city located on the Burma Road, which leads northward to Muse, the border town adjacent to Ruili in Yunnan.[6] According to the Yunnanese

5. *Dajie* (senior sister) is an address for senior females of one's own generation.

6. Lashio had also been the final stop for foreigners traveling to northern Shan State until October 2013 when the government relaxed the restriction and allowed foreigners to go northward to Muse.

Association in Lashio, the total population there is around 300,000, and the Yunnanese (including the Kokang) account for 180,000 (data given in 2010). A great majority of them are involved in trade of varying scales, especially the import-export trade with China. Since the late 1980s Lashio has been the hub for the Sino-Burmese trade.

Partly inspired by the trading opportunities in Lashio, and partly pressured by her family's financial demands, Qiu Dajie has undertaken various economic activities since the mid-1980s. She was born in 1954. Her husband, originally a successful jade trader, is in jail for the second time because of his drug addiction. He was sentenced to eight years the first time, and now five years. Qiu Dajie has been the sole economic supporter of the family for more than twenty years. In early 2000, she spent a few million kyat to send her two sons to Great Britain. She did not see any future for them in Burma and was afraid that they might take on bad habits, especially drugs, if they stayed in the country. Using the pretext of further study, they went to London. All these years they have continually registered at language schools in order to stay in the UK, while working full time in restaurants and hotels. Qiu Dajie also has a daughter, who went to Taiwan for a university education. The daughter did not finish her studies but managed to obtain local residency. She now lives with her boyfriend, and they run a small breakfast shop. Coincidently, she brought her Taiwanese boyfriend back to Lashio for the Chinese New Year in 2006 while I was conducting fieldwork there. (It was only the second time she had returned home in her ten-year absence from Burma.) Over the years, I have occasionally visited the family and the daughter in Lashio and Taiwan.

Qiu Dajie now lives in a big house with a niece from a mountain village who studies at a Chinese junior high school and helps with the housework. The house is a one-story villa with a large front yard and palm trees that grow along two sides of an enclosing wall. Several kinds of herbs and vegetables commonly used in Yunnanese cuisine, such as fennel, coriander, white pepper, eggplants, and chili, grow there as well. During the Chinese New Year of 2006 the kitchen was filled with food—two big pieces of salted pork and several rows of sausages hung on a bamboo pole (Figure 6–1), and many jars of pickled vegetables and preserved soybean curd were placed on the ground—all made by Qiu Dajie. Since all her children are grown up and away from home, Qiu Dajie is relatively free. She often plays mahjong with friends, but from time to time she engages in buying

Figure 6–1. Salted pork and sausages made by Qiu Dajie

and selling crops, especially corn. In addition, she participates in many loan-bidding associations (*biaohui*) that earn much profit in interest.

Curious about Qiu Dajie's entrepreneurial spirit, whenever possible I requested that she tell me stories about her business engagement. At the beginning she often repeated the familiar statement that even three books are not enough to contain her story, but she did not reveal much content. I was hanging around nearly every day while she taught me Yunnanese cooking. Yunnanese delicacies contain varieties of ingredients, and the preparation is time-consuming. I wasn't able to remember the complex procedures, but I always enjoyed the simple tasks she handed me—peeling garlic, cutting vegetables, grinding spices, etc. Perhaps stimulated by my good appetite for her food, Qiu Dajie's narrations gradually grew richer, like the wonderful dishes she presented. She said:

"It was the external environment that pushed me to take up trade. Before getting married, I dared not go anywhere, and dared not speak to strangers. I didn't have to work. I didn't even know how to cook. My mother did everything for me. My life was easy. I met my husband when I was sixteen. We were in love for four years, but my parents didn't agree with our relationship. In the end, I eloped with him to Lashio. I was twenty years old at that time.

"My husband went to jade mines to buy jade stones. He was very capable and made a lot of money. He purchased this big house twenty-five years ago [in 1981]. He had started to take drugs at that time, but I didn't know. He was not even a cigarette smoker when I first met him." She sighed. "Drug addicts are all the same. Once they get the habit, everything goes wrong. They demand money all the time. I was only twenty-seven years old then. I still looked very young, but I already had three children. They needed my support; I couldn't abandon them.

"When my youngest child was three or four years old, I started to sell goods at the market while a maid took care of the children. I worked hard to earn money in order to raise my kids and also to meet my husband's monetary demands. I had no trading experience and was unfamiliar with the price fluctuation of *hmaungkho* goods. I began selling a small amount of commodities, such as monosodium glutamate, yarns, and some other daily consumer goods that were brought in from China and Thailand. I purchased the merchandise from wholesale dealers in Lashio. Every morning I got up around five o'clock to cook breakfast and work in the garden. I

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sold my goods at the market from seven o'clock in the morning until four or five o'clock in the afternoon. After returning home, I cooked again. I didn't play mahjong at that time. I had no leisure time. The children were too young.

"From the early 1990s, I started to go to Mong Hsu to buy rubies. The trade brought in a good profit in the first few years. I traveled to Mong Hsu [via Tangyan] by car—it was a small pickup truck with two benches attached to either side of the truck bed with a tarp overhead. Sometimes there were too many people in the truck; some people had no seats and had to grab hold of a bar and hang out the back. The road conditions were very bad, especially during the rainy season. Very often travelers had to hire motorcyclists to take them for some parts of the journey. When the road went downhill, it was frightening; I had to close my eyes. I was also afraid that the motorcyclist might rob me.

"After arriving in Mong Hsu, it still took one day to walk up to the ruby mines. The mountain was steep. On reaching the mines, I roamed from one pit to another to buy raw rubies. I normally purchased one to two million kyat of rubies in one trip. On the way back to Lashio, I gave my rubies wrapped in a piece of cloth to the driver who hid them in a secret place in the truck. The journey was fraught with danger. We were robbed several times. Once three armed robbers raided us. They took away the passengers' watches and money. Luckily they didn't find the rubies the driver had hidden.

"After returning to Lashio, I would wash the raw rubies and polish them with oil. I divided them into different small bags according to size. In the first two years, I sold my rubies only in Lashio to Chinese and local buyers. I earned two hundred thousand kyat after the first trip. I was very happy with the profit. Later on friends told me that the profit would be much higher if I took them to Ruili or Tachileik. The latter in particular was important for the ruby trade, as dealers came from Thailand. During the next two years I often traveled to Tachileik to sell rubies despite the long journey. Sometimes I went by airplane; other times by car. If I took the airplane, I would give my ruby package with my name on it to an airport staff member who would arrange its safe transportation. Of course, I paid for the arrangement. After the plane arrived in the Tachileik airport, a customs agent would pick up the package and deliver it to the address I had given in advance. If I went by car, I gave my rubies to the

driver for safekeeping. It took a few days to reach Tachileik by vehicle. At night, passengers stayed at small hotels or villagers' houses. The cost was not much. The accommodation was rudimentary and dirty. Women slept together, separated from the men. The journey was harsh, really harsh [*leine zashilei*]."[7]

"Were female traders bothered by male traders during the journey?" I asked.

"No. Not if women behaved in a serious manner [*yiben zhengjing*] and did not joke with the men. Many women, including Shans, Burmans, Yunnanese, and other ethnic groups, participated in this venture regardless of how much danger was involved. I'm not afraid of death. I'm only afraid of not making enough money to support my children."

Qiu Dajie was in the ruby trade for four years. Afterward, for three or four years she was involved in carrying money for loans to the jade mines in Hpakant. This business is referred to as *zuo huishui*. Each time she carried from a few million to twenty or thirty million kyat packed in cartons. She said:

"I collaborated with my relatives in Mandalay in this business. They provided most of the capital, and I was in charge of carrying the money to the jade mines. It took one day and one night from Mandalay to Mogaung by train, and five to eight hours, depending on the road conditions, from Mogaung to Hpakant by car—it was a van with two passengers in the front seat and four other passengers at the back. Sometimes the car got stuck in mud during the rainy season. When encountering such a problem, the passengers had to find accommodation in a nearby village for a night. Every time I stayed in Hpakant four to five days, sometimes more than ten days. I only lent money to familiar traders and mining bosses, but I still encountered bad debts. Once I lent 470 million kyat to a mining boss referred to me by a friend. The borrower went bankrupt. I was unable to collect the debt and had to cover it alone."

"Where did you get the nerve for this risky business?" I asked.

"If you don't take risks, you starve [*nibuzuo yao efan*]," Qiu Dajie replied.

The interest rate was 20 percent at the beginning, and later reduced to 15 percent, then 10 percent, and then 5 percent, following the increasing

7. Qiu Dajie first traveled from Mong Hsu to Taunggyi by motorcycle and car and then to Tachileik by car or air.

number of creditors. Moreover, the Inwa Bank in Hpakant was established in 1999, which further hurt the business of underground lending (chapter 7). Qiu Dajie quit this business and started another venture—purchasing Chinese clothes in Ruili and selling them in Mandalay and Taunggyi. Since the late 1980s, the Burma-China border trade has been flourishing. Chinese consumer goods flow into Burma, while Burmese natural resources flow out to China. Before the Burmese government legalized border trade with China in 1988, the commerce between both sides operated underground. However, as informants point out, smuggling has remained rampant even since 1988, owing to arbitrary regulations and heavy taxation.[8]

In the last few years, Qiu Dajie has not traveled to Ruili as frequently as before—only about once a month. Instead, she spends more time playing mahjong, which has become a popular leisure activity among Yunnanese women in Burma since around 2000. Before that, only men, seen as the "official" breadwinners of their families, had the privilege of playing this game. This change indicates the women's growing economic power as well as their autonomy in arranging their lives.

Although Qiu Dajie no longer toils on business trips as much as before, she does not keep her money idle. She invests all her capital in loan-bidding associations, which are commonly referred to as *hui* (rotating credit). Such associations widely exist in Chinese societies to provide an informal mechanism for capital flow among the populace, whereas in Burma they function as an underground banking system.[9] Qiu Dajie participates in more than forty *hui*; half of them she organized herself. A *hui* is composed of a group of participants (mostly women) who contribute money periodically and wait for their turn to use the funds. The head of a *hui* (*huitou*) predetermines the minimal amount of interest in bidding and the interval for a bid. Qiu Dajie explains the mechanism using an example of a *hui* of 50,000 kyat and forty participants. Its minimal interest in bidding is 12,000 kyat, and the bid frequency is twice per month, on the first and fifteenth of every lunar month. There is no regulated limit for the maximal interest,

8. The major export commodities from China via Ruili include electronics, machinery, industrial and construction materials, textiles, cotton yarn, consumer goods, and fertilizers; those from Burma via Muse are agricultural produce, gems, fish, timber, minerals, and rubber. A large part of the traded merchandise has remained illegal (Chang 2013).

9. Similar mechanisms also exist in many other societies, especially in the developing world. F. J. A. Bouman refers to them as "rotating savings and credit associations" (1983).

but Qiu Dajie said that usually it does not go higher than 20,000 kyat with a *hui* of 50,000 kyat. The bidding targets the interest. Those who need capital for investment compete in bidding. The one who offers the highest amount of interest wins the bid and collects all the money contributed by the other members. After winning a bid, the participant cannot bid in the following rounds and has to contribute the full amount of *hui* money (*huiqian*), that is, 50,000 kyat, each time until the whole cycle of the *hui* completes. Those who have not collected the funds from their turns pay only a reduced amount. Take the tenth round of the *hui* of 50,000 kyat for an example. The offered amounts of interest in bidding range from 13,000 to 17,000 kyat. The one who offers 17,000 kyat wins the bid. Each of the previous bid-winners has to pay 50,000 kyat. The rest pay 33,000 kyat—the full amount of the *hui* money minus the highest amount of offered interest. The total collected amount is 50,000 kyat times eight[10] (people), plus 33,000 kyat times thirty-one (people), which amounts to 1,423,000 kyat.

The founding of a *hui* is based on trust. Usually the head of a *hui* invites only people who are familiar to her to participate. However, there is still the risk of bad debts, either from the head of a *hui* or other members. Qiu Dajie once encountered bad debts from a *hui* member who had collected the funds from her turn. That member claimed bankruptcy and disappeared. Being the head of the *hui*, Qiu Dajie had to cover the debts. Qiu Dajie commented: "Business contains risks. If you are afraid of risks, you can't make profits [yao zhuanqian jiuyou fengxian pafengxian jiu zhuanbuliaoqian]." Qiu Dajie participates in more than forty *hui* and sometimes bids for three *hui* a day.

What does Qiu Dajie's story tell? How do we interpret her business acumen and mobility in relation to her gender? In a paper tackling the issue of gender, transnationalism, and migration, Mahler and Pessar (2001) propose the concept "gendered geographies of power" to explore gender issues in migration. They advocate the analysis of people's social agency from both corporal and cognitive dimensions with reference to the

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10. It is the tenth round, but the one who wins the bid does not pay, and the *hui* organizer pays a reduced amount. (The head of a *hui* collects the funds of the first round contributed by the other members with a full amount of *hui* money, but for later rounds she only pays the same reduced amount as that of those who have not collected their funds. In other words, the head enjoys the privilege of an interest-free loan.)

multiple hierarchies of power within which they are situated. They stress the need to see "gender . . . not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process that is experienced through an array of social institutions from the family to the state" (ibid., 442). Its operation involves "multiple *spatial* and *social* scales . . . across transnational terrains" (445). In another paper, Pessar and Mahler (2003) apply this concept to examine the role of the state and the social imaginary in gendering transnational processes. In the face of the low visibility of women in migration studies, the framework is a useful reference. It also corresponds to several authors' emphasis on a study of gender and space that examines how gender relations affect women's and men's movement and how movement reinforces or transforms the migrants' gendered ideology (e.g., Hayami 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kaplan 1996; Massey 1994; Tsing 1993).

Drawing on Mahler and Pessar, we may ask: What are the cognitive changes underlying Qiu Dajie's corporal movement? How far does travel help her to break through the conventional hierarchies of power that are imposed upon women? How does she perceive her crossing not only geographical borders, but figuratively also over the borders originating from the female body, the family, and the Yunnanese community? Is there a new configuration of gender relations?

Without doubt, Qiu Dajie's experiences in trade demonstrate an entrepreneurial penchant that drives her to grasp different economic opportunities regardless of possible perils. Her repeated emphasis on risk-taking illustrates a daring spirit consistent with the trading ethos of the male merchants that characterizes the mule caravan trade. When encumbered with difficulties, she overcomes them and starts her business again and again. Her long-distance traveling in effect breaks through conventional spatial limitations on women. Nevertheless, instead of founding her economic practices on a desire for self-fulfillment, Qiu Dajie attributes her motivation to external causes resulting from unstable politico-economic conditions on the one hand and her husband's failure to provide sufficiently for the family's needs on the other. Once she said to me: "Women with good husbands do not need to venture out to make a living. The Cantonese and Fujianese came to Burma earlier and have built up their economic foundation. Most of them own shops, and their women do not have to travel for long distances to make a living, but help their husbands at

home." Therefore, Qiu Dajie's workforce engagement is primarily based on familial obligations to be a good mother and a good wife. This phenomenon is consistent with Seligmann's observation: "Frequently, women will enter the market as an extension of household tasks they perform as well as to make possible the economic survival of those households and, particularly, to secure the survival of their children" (2001, 3). In the same vein, Johanna Lessinger (2001, 73) refers to the idea of "sacrificial motherhood" as the central cultural value that impels women's economic participation in south India, and Charles F. Keyes (1984), with reference to Buddhist texts, interprets Thai women's economic pursuit as predicated on the role of nurturing mother.

Regardless of Qiu Dajie's economic success, she laments her marriage and is aware of Yunnanese moral constraints on women. She said: "We Yunnanese are conservative. Even when women marry bad husbands, they don't divorce them. I don't like to stay in this house. I'm depressed with the relationship with my husband. I don't want to see him. Yet, I still visit him at the prison twice every month with cooked food. If I didn't go, my conscience would feel uneasy. But every time we meet we quarrel."

Paradoxically, although Qiu Dajie had the nerve to elope with her husband and risk her life to engage in trade, she will not divorce him for fear of transgressing Yunnanese tradition. Didn't elopement and economic pursuit via long-distance traveling also deviate from the Yunnanese tradition?

Several times Qiu Dajie expressed regret for her elopement. She said that because of it, her parents severed their relationship with her, and she did not visit her natal family until ten years after her marriage. Moreover, she sees her daughter repeating the same mistake. She does not approve of her daughter's relationship with her Taiwanese boyfriend, who has a ten-year-old daughter from his previous marriage. She is angry that this man does not intend to hold a public wedding with her daughter, and she considers him unreliable. She is much concerned about her daughter's reputation among the Yunnanese community. Accordingly, breaking away from the spatial confinement of women is acceptable when it is justified by familial demands; however, transgression against the gendered confinement of women for one's own sake is not. Despite the fact that women's economic pursuits indicate inner strength and creativity, their rationale is determined by the obligatory norms of being good daughters, wives,

and mothers. (Ae Maew's story also attests to the same rationale.) In other words, their economic performance is not initiated by their desire for individual autonomy per se, but by a primary concern for familial stability and their family members' (especially their children's) well-being. The change in gendered geography has thus not really resulted in a new configuration of gender relations.

How then do women traders identify and differentiate themselves from their male counterparts? On one occasion, I asked Qiu Dajie what the differences are between men and women in business making. She answered:

"Generally we women are not as audacious as men. Men make quick decisions and aim for big trade. Men may go bankrupt quickly, but women are only able to obtain petty profits [*nande kuadekuai nyude zhangbudehao*]."

I pursued the subject: "Would you prefer to be a man or woman in your next life?"

"Of course—a man. A woman has to take care of children, do housework, as well as make money. Men don't care about their families. Most men don't."

"Is having menstruation inconvenient in traveling?"

"No, it's OK. When my period came, I still went for my trade. However, women are inconvenienced in other respects. If a mining boss comes to ask you to go with him to see rubies at night, do you dare go? I don't. But for men it is not a problem. Usually sellers do not sell high-price rubies to women. They think that only men dare to make quick decisions. Sometimes a deal requires secret negotiation or drinking, but this is not convenient for women."

Obviously, migrant Yunnanese women confront more obstacles in trade than the men do, not only because of the external politico-economic structure, but also because of the gendered discrimination imposed by patriarchal ideologies. Given these circumstances, the women's economic adventurism highlights their extraordinary courage and dynamism. Although their economic gain may not be comparable to men's in practice, it has greatly contributed to their household sustenance. One important factor that facilitates their economic activities is reciprocity originating from social networks, especially kinship connections that provide business information and capital loans. Qiu Dajie's account attests to this fact. The following story from two sisters who collaborate in trade provides another example.

Two Sisters

Dajie (eldest sister) and Erjie (second elder sister) are in their mid-fifties.[11] They grew up in a mountain village in northern Shan State and moved to Taunggyi in the late 1960s. The sisters have been very close since childhood. They are both married and had their houses built next to each other in 1998. They do many things together, such as shopping, visiting friends, making clothes, and engaging in economic ventures. Dajie's husband works as a van driver between Taunggyi and Yangon. Erjie's husband was a small boss in the jade mines from the early 1970s to the early 1990s. He was unable to accumulate wealth from this business and was compelled to leave the mines in 1992, as his capital limitations did not allow him to offer tender for mining concessions (see chapter 7). Since then he has been mostly idle at home.

From a young age, the two sisters had to contribute to the household economy by working on poppy farms. One afternoon, they recounted their memories of the opium harvest, which they called *hua yanbao*. Dajie said:

"Poppy pods are round. When scoring them, you have to use the right strength, neither incising too deep nor too shallow. The pods can be scored three times at intervals of a few days. The first incision is called *toujiangdao*, and the second incision *erjiangdao*. Before starting to work, an agreement [concerning the payment] is made with the farm owner. Usually the agreement is that the collected resin from the upper side of the blade belongs to the owner and that of the underside belongs to the worker. The first day you score the pods. The second day you use the upper side of a blade to scrape the resin from the pods and collect the drops of resin on the leaves with the underside of the blade. At the end of the day you give the resin from the upper side of the blade to the farm owner and keep the small amount from the underside for yourself. You may also sell the amount on the underside to the owner."

Erjie added: "Poppy flowers are very beautiful. They are red, purple, and white. The whole field is really beautiful. Poppy seeds are delicious too. They are small and white with a special fragrance. After the harvest, we would collect them when they had turned dry. They were delicious in soup."

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11. I interviewed them in January 2005, January 2006, and June 2007 at their homes in Taunggyi.

Dajie had four years of education at a Burmese primary school. She said: "Life was difficult. I had to take care of the younger siblings, do housework, and also go to school." As for Erjie, unfortunately she did not have a chance to attend school. At age fifteen she went to Taunggyi to look for work. She was caught by the police for having no identity papers and was put in prison for five months. Interestingly, she learned Burmese from other inmates during this period. In their early twenties, both sisters were married in Taunggyi.

In the late 1970s, both sisters started a small business together by selling noodles and garden pea gruel (*xidoufen*) on a street corner near a school. Dajie said: "The business was very good. We bought five bowls to start with, and quickly added ten and then twenty. Many students came to eat at noon or after school. We didn't have time to wash the used bowls. After one student finished eating, we immediately filled that bowl with pea gruel for another student." Dajie and Erjie laughed at the memory.

In the late 1970s, women started participating in border trade by truck or car, a method that gradually became popular in the 1980s. People refer to this venture as *pao shengyi*, distinguishing it from the border trade conducted by men by means of mule caravans, referred to as *pao mabang*. Informants pointed out that the trucks of the Burmese government that transported supplies to the border areas adjacent to Thailand were often used for delivering contraband. Such a caravan often amounted to over one hundred vehicles. The drivers were paid to bring passengers and goods.[12] Informants estimated that the amount smuggled by vehicle may have accounted for 20 to 30 percent of the total underground transportation from the 1970s to the early 1980s and since then has rapidly come to predominate. While the mule caravan traders were mostly involved in smuggling large quantities of goods, the border traders by vehicle usually carried a smaller amount. At checkpoints, they bribed the Burmese officials in order to avoid confiscation. Nevertheless, bribery did not always work, especially when the offer was small.

In 1983 both sisters started to engage in border trade by going to Tachileik. Dajie said: "We saw people making money from the border trade by means of vehicle transportation, so we tried it too. Different ethnic groups

12. Very few private cars were used in business in these areas prior to the late 1980s because there were many ethnic rebels and bandits.

participated in this trade, including Shans, Burmans, Yunnanese, Kachins, Lisus, Benglongs, Karens, and Pa-Os. There were more women than men." Accordingly, while the mule caravan trade was dominated by male Yunnanese traders, the contraband trade by vehicle was undertaken by different ethnic groups, and especially by women.

Dajie and Erjie carried homemade food to Tachileik for sale. Dajie said: "When winter arrived, we spent two months making preserved meat, sausages, and pickled vegetables, and then we took them to Tachileik for sale. We had to carry our own bedding for the journey. After we sold the food in Tachileik, we crossed the border to Mae Sai to purchase Thai goods, such as monosodium glutamate, adults' clothes, children's clothes, and shoes. After shopping we took our commodities back to Tachileik and waited for a governmental truck to go back. It was safer to take a governmental vehicle in order to avoid robbery by ethnic rebels. Trucks had to climb up and down the mountains on very bad roads. Sometimes they overturned and passengers got killed. The dead bodies were lined next to each other on the side of the road. The rows of corpses were a frightful sight."

Erjie added: "When arriving at the checkpoints, I was always very nervous. My whole body sweated and shook. Sometimes the officials took away all of our goods. We had to kowtow to them and try to pull back our stuff. Sometimes they gave back our merchandise after we paid some money, but other times small bribery didn't work. We were petty traders and not able to pay too much."

By the mid-1980s, Dajie and Erjie also went to Ruili to buy Chinese merchandise. Dajie said: "The road was bumpy and winding. Whenever the drivers [transporting contraband goods] spotted a vehicle belonging to customs officials, they would speed up and wind around to look for a side road for hiding.[13] We lost our goods three times. Once we were on our way back to Taunggyi. Our car was intercepted by a customs vehicle from the Heho airport [one hour away from Taunggyi]. I was carrying fifteen packages of monosodium glutamate and fifteen pairs of shoes. They were all confiscated by the customs agents. I had a six-month-old child on my back and tried to pull the confiscated goods from a customs agent, but he took them back. I pulled them again, and he grabbed them back again.

13. Civilians' cars ran on this route because it was safer than the route between Taunggyi and Tachileik.

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That agent shouted at me: 'If you still don't go, I will take you to prison.' I answered: 'I'm trying to make a living for my children. Why do you want to take me to prison?' In the end my goods were confiscated. Customs officials are licensed robbers! Thinking of those experiences I still feel frightened."

"You were scared of being caught by the officials, but you continued in this trade," I expressed in amazement.

"Teacher Chang, we were pushed by circumstances. If we didn't go out to trade, what did we eat? Children had to eat every day. Everything cost money. We had to look for money to raise our children," Dajie replied.

"How did you enter China? Did you have to pay taxes?" I asked.

Dajie said: "Each time we applied for a temporary pass. We tried to avoid taxes. It was easier to negotiate with the Chinese officials than the Burmese ones. Once a customs agent asked me: 'Why didn't you declare your goods at customs? Where are you from?' I said: 'We are from Burma. We bought these goods at companies. We don't need to pay a tax.' That customs agent said: 'Who told you that you don't need to pay a tax?' We then bargained with him and paid 150 RMB."

Like many Yunnanese women, Dajie and Erjie shouldered much of the responsibility for their household economy. They engaged in the border trade until 1990, when some of their children started to work. They said they toiled physically too much in the past and now suffer from joint and lower back pain. Even during their pregnancies they traveled until one month prior to delivery, and one month after giving birth they started to travel again. Even now they are not completely retired. Dajie still sells textiles in the market, while Erjie makes children's shoes at home. In one meeting with Erjie's husband, he acknowledged that his wife covered most of the family's expenses, for his jade-mining business did not bring him a stable income. Sometimes Erjie even had to obtain a loan to assist him in mining investments.

In another meeting I raised the question: "What is the difference between men and women in business making?"

Dajie and Erjie giggled at my question. Dajie said: "Men do not save money. During their trips, they spend too much on food and drink [*dachi dahe*]. Women are different. We save every penny. We pack food from home. Even when we have to spend money on board and lodging, we look for the cheapest."

Erjie added: "Women make money with whatever opportunities they find, even when the profit is petty. We are not choosy. Earlier when we

took preserved meat and pickled vegetables to Tachileik for sale, some people questioned us and said: 'What can you earn from the food?' Well, we take whatever we can get."

Dajie's and Erjie's remarks on the gender differences in business are commonly echoed by other Yunnanese women. The idea of sacrificial motherhood is embedded in their practices. As Dajie said, women save every penny for their children. They also tend to feed and clothe them better. Another female informant in her fifties confirms this virtue. She said her late husband was the only son in his family and idle throughout his life. She thus had to shoulder the family finances throughout her marriage by participating in cross-border trade for nearly twenty years and then by opening a restaurant. Her mother-in-law helped look after her children when they were small. Despite being the breadwinner of the household, this female trader saved the better food for her children and husband. She said: "In the past, one sack of good white rice cost four hundred kyat and the coarse brown rice three hundred kyat. I purchased both types and cooked the good rice for my husband and children and the coarse rice for me and my mother-in-law."[14] Women's sacrificial behavior on the one hand illustrates their embracing love for their families, but on the other it also suggests an acceptance of the social perception of men's status as superior to women's. They are conscious of this gender inequality and often lament the multiple hardships they have to endure.

While the idea of sacrificial motherhood is essential to women, it is however circumscribed. In the past, the means of birth control were limited; women often resorted to abortion for unwanted births. A friend's mother (of a Yunnanese Muslim family) in her early sixties confided to me that she had four abortions after having given birth to eight children.[15] She said: "Every family used to have eight, ten, or twelve children. I know one family with eighteen children. After giving birth to my eighth child, I thought it was enough. My children were growing up; they needed to eat and study, and that required much money. Hence, I started to help my husband trade in rotating markets in the mountain areas of Tangyan.

14. Although the brown rice actually has better nutritional value than the white rice, Chinese in general consider the latter to have better quality.

15. Abortion was used among both Han and Muslim women, although the latter commonly deny this, saying that abortion violates their religion. However, the confession of this friend's mother disproves the general denial.

When I got pregnant again, abortion was the only way to curb the birth. I went to a Baiyi midwife and lay on a bamboo bed. That midwife touched my belly. After a while the fetus came out. In total, I had four abortions." The informant made light of the process, but another female informant told me that it was not touching but squeezing the belly, and that many women actually got infections or died from abortions.

In the face of numerous impediments to their economic efforts and private lives, female trading partners provide not only economic reciprocity but also emotional support for each other. They share family problems and are very willing to lend a hand in domestic work such as baby-sitting and cooking meals. While cheating takes place from time to time between male trading partners, especially in business collaboration involving large amounts of capital (Chang 2004), it occurs much less frequently among women traders.

As the "second sex" of a migrant group, largely located in peripheral areas (before the 1980s), Yunnanese women engaged in economic activities that resulted in the transgression of conventional Chinese gendered ideologies, national boundaries, and even their own bodies (especially in the case of abortion). Figuratively, we may regard this result as transgression of the ideological border, geographical border, and the corporal border. Apart from the various factors already examined—the demands of family finance, the politico-economic structure in Burma, Yunnanese networks and their geographical habitation—two other elements contribute to their economic pursuit. First, their experiences of fleeing transnationally and later repeatedly moving compelled them to break out of the traditional spatial confinement and tossed them into an unknown world with new problems and possibilities. The migration stories related by Ae Maew's mother shed light on this aspect. Second, the long trading history of indigenous women in Burma encourages them toward economic participation. It is a prevailing scene that indigenous women (Burmans and ethnic minorities) peddle on streets and in markets (Cochrane 1904, 55; Harriden 2012, 19).[16] Gender norms concerning division of labor in the host society are comparatively looser than those of the Han and Muslim Chinese in Yunnan. This situation in effect helps Yunnanese women to extend their household engagement to the market and long-distance trade.

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16. In Southeast Asia women as traders in local markets have had a long history; see Andaya (2006, 123–24) and Reid (1988,162–64).

Several female informants frankly expressed having experienced a kind of happiness during their travels with women of various ethnic groups. They often used the Burmese word *byo* to describe any interesting, funny, or happy experiences during the journey. For example, they said traveling in groups to many places and seeing people of different ethnic groups is *zashi byo* (really interesting/happy). Although they did not refer directly to personal freedom and still stressed the sense of family responsibility as most fundamental for their engagement in trade, their happiness derived from the journey implies recognition of self-autonomy, and their borrowing of the Burmese word for such an expression indicates that the host society may have exerted some influence on their pursuit of independence and self-reliance.

However, some local norms or practices are also seen by the Yunnanese as markers of ethnic differentiation. Elopement is a distinctive example. Qiu Dajie eloped with her husband, who is also Yunnanese Han, and was compelled to sever connections with her natal family for ten years. One of Erjie's daughters eloped with a Pa-O boy. To save the family's honor, Erjie and her husband organized a wedding for the young couple after having located their whereabouts. Although elopement is an accepted practice in some areas by non-Han ethnic groups, the Yunnanese Chinese consider it shameful to the family, especially when it involves intermarriage with non-Chinese. To emphasize their sense of cultural superiority, Yunnanese often criticize the ethnic others as being loose or immoral in their sexual conduct and express their contempt toward the practice of elopement. Nevertheless, it occurs from time to time among the Yunnanese. Xue Dashen in the following account attests to this influence.

Xue Dashen

Xue Dashen's[17] first daughter-in-law, a Shan lady, was Ae Maew's best friend during high school.[18] Ae Maew took me to visit Xue Dashen for the first time in Mandalay in January 2005. In 1990 Xue Dashen's family

17. *Dashen* (junior aunt) is an address for female adults whose husbands are younger than one's father. I interviewed Xue Dashen at her home in Mandalay in January 2005 and January 2006.

18. Culturally, the Shan are recognized as a friendly ethnic group by the Yunnanese. While Yunnanese normally are not keen on intermarriages with ethnic others, some parents (but not all) accept their sons marrying Shan women.

moved from Mohnyin (in Kachin State) to Mandalay, Burma's second-largest city. The population of Mandalay totals about one million, according to the UN estimate in 2007.[19] During the 1970s and 1980s, many Yunnanese moved from rural areas to the city because of frequent fighting in the countryside. After 1990, following the opening of the Burmese market, far more Yunnanese from other towns and villages arrived to look for opportunities. Many of them have joined the jade trade (chapter 7). The registered Yunnanese households in the Yunnanese Association number around five thousand. Estimated figures, given by local Yunnanese, for their population (including the Kokang) in the city range between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand. However, outsiders tend to estimate much higher.[20]

Xue Dashen is in her early sixties and of the third generation in Burma. She grew up in Tarmoenye, a town in northern Shan State, and married at age fifteen. She said: "In our region when a boy sees a girl and likes her, he will steal her [*xihuan jiu qu toulai*]. Usually it is by mutual agreement. The boy tries to win the girl's heart by giving her presents, such as a bangle or a ring. They will set a date for elopement. In earlier days, there were three big fairs a year. While normally constrained in their movement, girls were allowed to go to these fairs. Boys would take these opportunities to look for their potential partners. That was how I met my husband [also a Yunnanese Han]. I was very young when I got married. I knew nothing and blindly accepted the courtship.

"After marriage, we lived in a mountain village named Mohau. We grew poppies, rice, corn, and raised pigs. Sometimes my husband went to Mogok for the ruby trade, but he didn't make money out of it. There were many ethnic insurgent groups around our region, and the living conditions were insecure. We therefore moved to Kutkai [north of Lashio]. I sewed clothes for five years with five or six hired workers there. The business was very good.

"I gave birth at twenty-one. Two years later, when I was pregnant with the second child, my husband went to Yangon and had a mistress. A

19. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandalay

20. Wikipedia gives an estimate of 20 percent of the total population; that is around two hundred thousand. In addition, there are new immigrants from China. A report by the *Irrawaddy* in September 2009 says that more than two hundred thousand Chinese have entered Burma from Yunnan in the last ten years (Jagan 2009). Many of them move back and forth between China and Burma.

year later, he came back and asked me to forgive him. I then gave birth to another three children in Kutkai.

"While in Kutkai, my husband was jailed once for dealing drugs. The police came to search our house and took away everything. The children and I were starving. There was nothing left to eat. Finally, I managed to borrow one thousand kyat to bail him out. A few years later, we moved from Kutkai to Mohnyin. My husband then went to Hpakant to trade jade stones. He was home only three months a year. I raised pigs, made pickles, and distilled alcohol (*kaojiu*). I had to get up at one o'clock in the morning to steam sticky rice for later fermentation and to distill alcohol from the diluted solutions of ethanol that had been produced from fermented sticky rice. Distilling was an arduous process that required changing water time and again in a wok. I kept climbing up and down, up and down to change water. Around five o'clock I ended the work and cooked breakfast. After breakfast, I went to the market and then came back to do housework. I also had to feed the pigs and sew clothes to sell. I was still young and busy all day long. I gave birth to another four children in Mohnyin. Sometimes the Burmese army or Kachin rebels came to the village to demand money and crops and to dragoon people for military service. Life was difficult, really difficult. Whenever I felt too fretful or perturbed, I would go to temples to seek divine guidance by drawing lots [*qiuqian*]."

In contrast to Xue Dashen's sacrificial efforts to support the family, Xue Dashu (her husband), like most Yunnanese men, seemed to concentrate on economic speculation for his own sake. In my interviews with him his narration always centered on the gem trade, without reference to his family. He told me about different trade experiences and confided his repeated failures in business deals. He said: "In 1976 I went to jade mines and purchased three pieces of jade stone, which turned out to be imitations. I lost all my money and had to return home to look for money (*zhaoqian*). Later on, I went to the mines, but again I lost my money in bad deals. Such business failures were repeated seven times in the mines. Between 1984 and 1986, I collaborated with a few partners and entrusted our stones to the jade company of the Qius in Chiang Mai. But the partners in Thailand cheated me on the selling prices. Another time a partner took a jade stone to Hong Kong and sold it for forty-eight million Hong Kong dollars, but he told me it was sold for four million Hong Kong dollars."

The case of Xue Dashen and Xue Dashu reflects the common phenomenon of gender differences in familial devotion and economic involvement

among the Yunnanese migrants in Burma. For women, the family's well-being remains the primary concern. Their accounts of economic engagement are always interwoven with those of domestic tasks and familial relationships. But for men, economic undertaking, especially in risky trade, is more a demonstration of manhood. Male informants speak a lot about their economic adventures but seldom make mention of their familial life. Although some men talk about education for their children, they avoid the subject of the husband-and-wife relationship.

By contrast, many female informants are expressive about their domestic life. They point out the fact that many Yunnanese men have mistresses or even set up a second family while away for business. Xue Dashen said: "My husband once had a mistress in Yangon. After he returned to me, that mistress came to Kutkai to look for him. I was furious. I took a rope to tie my *longyi* and thrust a package of salt and chili powder inside the *longyi* that I intended to stuff into that mistress's vagina [*yan tade sichu*]. I found that woman and my husband staying in a rented house. I beat that woman badly and grabbed back my watch and necklace that my husband had given to her. The onlookers cheered my action. I grabbed my husband and said: 'Time to go home.' He pleaded with me to calm down and went home with me.

"My husband and I seldom exchange good words. Our destinies are not compatible [*minggong buhe*]. I have been married to him for many years, and I tolerated his mischievous conduct for the sake of the children. Women are always at a disadvantage in marriage and have to endure the condition. Men may go out to gamble or look for mistresses [*zhao poniang*], but we women have to maintain the marriage. When men have the internal illness [*neibing*, meaning sexual urge] while away from home, they will seek doctors [meaning women]. If I don't see it, I let it go. But if it happens in front of my eyes, I will kill the woman who seduces my husband. I have many children and can't leave them behind. Baiyi women, they would have abandoned their children; but we Han women have to endure the condition [baiyi shi zhuai zhe hanren shi cheng zhe]. We cannot afford to make a mistake."

Xue Dashen's narration reflects her awareness of gender inequality, but like other Yunnanese women of her generation, she makes compromises to fit the Chinese patriarchal norms. No matter how much she contributes to the household finances, her husband officially represents the family. She knows that a divorced woman has no social position and is looked down

upon. That is why she said that women cannot afford to make a mistake, and that despite her husband's disloyalty, her revenge target was the mistress, possibly a Baiyi or Burman woman, and not her husband. This shows Xue Dashen's strength and determination to protect herself and her children from a threat that might tear her family apart and to what extent this Yunnanese migrant society allows her to handle the situation. The onlookers represent the general public of the Yunnanese community. They cheered her victory in defeating the mistress and winning her husband back. But if Xue Dashen had also beaten her husband and divorced him, the onlookers may not have cheered for her, but blamed her for cruelty. Although divorce occurs nowadays among the younger generation, it is not socially sanctioned. In a few cases that I know, the divorced women are considered unfortunate, but not necessarily the men. The children, especially male progeny, normally remain with the husbands. Moreover, if their natal families are not supportive, divorced women are put in a dreadful situation.

These stories have examined the economic and familial experiences of a few small- and middle-scale women traders and highlighted their subjectivities characterized by dynamism in overcoming a range of challenges and adversities as well as their own frustration and ambivalence. Their economic tactics concentrate on interactions with the volatile and oppressive policies of the Burmese socialist period. The following narrator, Zhou Dajie, a successful entrepreneur, shares stories that illustrate her mercantile talents during both the socialist and post-socialist periods.

Zhou Dajie

I visited Zhou Dajie, an active businesswoman in her early fifties, in Taunggyi in 2005. She was born in Tangyan in 1954 and belongs to the second generation in Burma. Her father ran a shop, which burned down when she was three years old. The family then moved to a village in the Wa Hills, east of Tangyan, called Manxiang. Her father opened a new shop there, which was often patronized by the KMT guerrillas and indigenous Wa. That village had no school, so her father organized Chinese schooling for his and other Yunnanese children of the village. She said:

"When I was twelve years old, my father was killed on a business trip by gangsters. I had two younger brothers and one younger sister. My mother

was compelled to take up the economic responsibility for the whole family. I remember unrest was growing in the area where we stayed at that time. There were different armed ethnic groups. Most Yunnanese didn't have legal status. We didn't know the Burmese language and dared not go to urban areas.

"When I was fourteen, my mother moved the family to Nongkang, which was nineteen kilometers from Manxiang. She started to sell goods at rotating markets. She alone led three mules, which were loaded with different kinds of pickled food and everyday consumer goods. With the profits, she purchased more mules and hired Baiyi muleteers to transport tobacco. A few years later, we had more than thirty mules. I took charge of the domestic work and looked after my younger siblings. But the region became more and more insecure. Our home was robbed once and burned down twice. My mother was tough. She tried to maintain a home for us in the face of adversity."

Zhou Dajie married at age seventeen. Her husband originally worked for a Taiwanese intelligence unit, Division 1920, under the command of the Intelligence Department in Taiwan. Its mission was to collect intelligence concerning Chinese Communists in Burma and Yunnan. Except for some cadre officials sent from Taiwan, most of its members were recruited from among the Yunnanese refugees in Burma. After marriage Zhou Dajie and her husband moved to Taunggyi for one year and then to Chiang Mai for another year. While living in Chiang Mai, she learned dressmaking, and after moving back to Taunggyi she opened a small dressmaking studio. Her husband joined another armed ethnic group and was away most of the time on military missions. Zhou Dajie essentially maintained the family finances. She said: "At that time, the fee for making a jacket was thirty-five kyat, which was enough for one day's living for a family of four people. However, you couldn't get rich by being a dressmaker. I taught dressmaking during the day and made dresses at night. I also had to breastfeed my babies." To improve the family's finances, Zhou Dajie started to run a breakfast shop with her eldest sister-in-law in 1981. She said:

"We saw that other people made money in the restaurant business; so we wanted to have a try. We began selling breakfast, including *monhinkha* [rice vermicelli in fish soup], *baozi* [steamed stuffed bun], *youtiao* [deep-fried breadstick], milk, and soy milk. We hired two cooks. Our food was good and we had many customers. Two years later we ended the breakfast

business and opened a restaurant. We hired a chef from Yangon, who was narrow-minded and didn't allow me or my sister-in-law to enter the kitchen for fear we would steal his skills. However, he was unable to handle things alone in the kitchen. Clients were impatient waiting for their food. My sister-in-law and I had to keep apologizing to them. Finally he allowed us to help him cut vegetables in the kitchen. I secretly observed how he cooked, in addition to studying cookbooks and experimenting by cooking different dishes. Whenever I succeeded in making a dish, I would take the food to treat the chair of the Yunnanese Association and different shop owners with whom I had business and requested them to recommend our restaurant to their friends and customers.

"As our business became better and better, we hired the second chef. Unfortunately, 'a mountain cannot accommodate two tigers' [*yishan burong erhu*]. The first chef was looking for an opportunity to harm the second chef. Once when our restaurant was booked for a banquet, he saw the opportunity. He went out to drink the night before the banquet. Next day he said he didn't feel well and couldn't do the purchasing himself. The second chef had to do the job, but he was inexperienced. The purchased quantities were not enough. It was shameful that we were unable to provide a full bowl for each dish. Guests complained that they didn't have enough to eat. I thus had to apologize to all the guests. I humbled myself and said to the banquet host: 'We made a mistake in the purchase. You may pay whatever price you would like to. I will not ask for a full price.' After that, I learned to calculate the needed quantities for purchase and didn't rely on the first chef. Later on, when the restaurant was booked again for a banquet, I said to myself: 'I must save the restaurant's name in this deal. I will provide big full bowls of all dishes, even if I may not make money.' I calculated the needed quantities and supervised in the kitchen. It had to be more and not less [*keyi duo bukeyi shao*]. As a result, the guests were very satisfied with the food. I successfully recovered the name of our restaurant in one day. After that our restaurant had very good business. If I had not made some sacrifice in that deal, our business may not have been able to recover. My principle was: 'I must not let the customers down as I make money from them.'"

It is interesting to see how Zhou Dajie built up her business from small investment to larger investment. She had the courage to try new things and exerted herself to learn each step. She knew how to promote her restaurant

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through her connections and was willing to make short-term sacrifices for long-term development. Her interaction with government officials further illustrates her strategy. She said: "Many officials liked to eat at our restaurant. When they came alone or with their families, I would not charge them, but requested that they help our business. By doing so, I got many deals from the government."

Based on her wide connections, in 1992 Zhou Dajie and her sister-in-law opened a general store in Taunggyi and another one in Mong Hsu. Zhou Dajie hired a driver to transport goods from Taunggyi to Mong Hsu. She said: "There were more than thirty checkpoints on the road. The driver was a Shan, a trustworthy person. He made good contacts with all the Burmese officials. Whenever a new official arrived, my driver would inform me. We would send special presents to him. In addition, we paid tea money [bribery] at each checkpoint on each trip. If you do not maintain a good relationship with the officials at these checkpoints, your car will be assigned to deliver supplies for the Burmese army. We had very good business in Mong Hsu. The shop there required five to six replenishments a month. I could do all the arrangements by phone and had no need for long-distance travel."

Moreover, the two shops provided underground banking, which was a common service provided by big general stores in Burma. Traders or mine owners could deposit their money at Zhou Dajie's shop in Taunggyi before going to Mong Hsu. After arriving in Mong Hsu, they went to her shop there to collect the money. This service guaranteed the safety of the deposit, and big traders and mine owners resorted to it. Traders could also borrow money from the Mong Hsu shop and return the loan later to their Taunggyi location. With the returned debts, the Taunggyi shop ordered goods for the Mong Hsu shop. Consequently, their two connected locations facilitated the circulation of capital, commodities, and people between Taunggyi and Mong Hsu. The credit model resembles that of Hpakant.

In 1993, Zhou Dajie ended the restaurant business and embarked on a new venture by opening a distillery, an enterprise that required a lot of capital and good connections. She said:

"I got to know a Burmese general from my restaurant business. He asked me if I was interested in doing any new business. I heard alcohol distillation made a lot of money and told him that I would like to engage in it. A sister of that general also joined the business. The general helped us

obtain a distillation license and a wholesale license. It took five months to build the distillery. We started selling liquor in 1994. At the beginning we only produced spirit liquors. But sales were not good. Only later I realized that most Burmese drink light liquors. Moreover, the wholesale license was regional and only allowed selling within a certain area and not the whole country. The market had already been dominated by a few brands, and it was difficult to break in. I tried to introduce our products to liquor agents, but most of them had already established deals with other distilleries and would not sell our products. In the end only a few agents were willing to work with us. We thus had to assign low prices for retailers in different places. Some agents and retailers disappeared, and we were not able to collect money from them. From 1994 to 1999, the business was in the red. That general's sister withdrew her share in 1996. It was very difficult to sustain the business alone, but I didn't want to give up.

"I bought books on spirits from Taiwan and China and different types of liquors from abroad. I studied them and experimented in mixing spirits. Originally I didn't drink alcohol at all. But I have a very good sense of smell and am now an expert in mixing spirits. I also surveyed the liquor market, which was dominated by different spheres of influence. I started to fight for my own domain without considering appearances [*sipolian de zheng*]. Only then did my business gain traction."

Zhou Dajie did not relate the details of her fight for the market, but she mentioned that she went to visit some *lukyi* (big men), meaning high-ranking officials, in Yangon. She said: "You need to obtain different types of licenses and tender for monopoly sale in different regions. At the beginning, I didn't fully understand the bidding process. I thought one would win a bid by offering a high price. But many bidders have private deals with the officials with a promise to give them a certain amount of tea money each year. Now I have certain agents who only sell our products, and I have obtained licenses for distillation, wholesale, producing white liquors, colored liquors, and glass bottles. Our brand is well accepted, and our volume is increasing. Every year I spend more than ten million kyat on Burmese officials."

Zhou Dajie is now a successful female entrepreneur. Apart from the distillery, she owns a sugar mill next to the factory and a hotel in Mengla. Both were set up in early 2000. Some relatives also hold small shares. (She closed the general stores in 1996 following the decline of ruby mining in

Mong Hsu.) The sugar industry complements the liquor making, because the molasses drained from raw sugar during the refining process is used in distillation. The hotel is a new undertaking. Mengla is a popular border town, eighty-five kilometers north of Kengtung. It is controlled by the armed ethnic Wa, and it is well known for casino games and active nightlife. Chinese tourists visit in large numbers, and Chinese currency is used there. The establishment of Zhou Dajie's hotel is partly attributed to her husband's connection with some Wa leaders who control the region's political economy. Zhou Dajie entrusts its management to a cousin and goes there once every other week.

In contrast to Zhou Dajie's active life, her husband remains much quieter. After leaving the army in 1975, he participated in long-distance trade for many years but without much success. In the past ten years, he has spent a lot of time playing mahjong and golf. Although his earlier military engagement did not bring about economic rewards, it has enlarged the family's social capital. Officially, he is still the head of the family, but its actual management is run by his wife.

In contrast with the previous cases, the prominence of Zhou Dajie's entrepreneurship is grounded on her well-established connections with multiple hierarchies of power that assist in her economic expansion. Although the post-socialist regime has issued various market-oriented policies since 1988, business opportunities are still based by and large on deals between the officials and businessmen under the table. The multiple hierarchies of power from the local to the central levels, plus the ethnic forces in different areas, simultaneously function as constraints and facilitators for economic operations, depending on the businessmen and women's interactions with them. Zhou Dajie's story illuminates her sensibility in cultivating political resources from a young age. She mentioned the KMT's patronage of her father's shop, her husband's political ties with the KMT and other ethnic military groups, and her networks with local Burmese officials cultivated while running the restaurant business, and later with the "big men" in Yangon who facilitated her distillation enterprise. The backing of these political powers, compounded by her willingness to take risks in large-scale business investment, demonstrates characteristics rarely seen among Yunnanese women.

What is the main factor that contributes to Zhou Dajie's business penchant? How does her gender affect her career development? In one

conversation, Zhou Dajie attributed her economic keenness primarily to her mother's influence. She said: "My mother arrived in Burma to look for her father who had fled Yunnan a year before her. The political conditions were chaotic in rural Shan State. Ethnic troops fought against one another. My grandfather was an intellectual and didn't know how to trade at all. My mother worked on farms and made clothes and pickled food and snacks for sale. After marrying my father, she helped him run a shop. When my father passed away, she became the sole pillar of the family. I witnessed how she struggled in a very insecure environment to sustain the household economy by trading in rotating markets. She exerted herself to protect the family and suffered all her life."

Being the eldest daughter, Zhou Dajie learned from her mother to take responsibility for sustaining the family. She adhered to this role while her husband was away for a military career and later for long-distance trade. While the female traders of the previous cases also emphasize this virtue of self-sacrifice and caring for the family, Zhou Dajie explicitly attributes its practice to the mother-daughter identification,[21] meaning that the continuity of the female roles of daughter, wife, and mother anchors the principle of the household's well-being from generation to generation. Its realization is rooted in the mothers' upbringing of their daughters to always put consideration of the family before themselves. (This is very different from the upbringing of sons that encourages them to explore the world; see chapter 3.)

Although a patriarchal community, Yunnanese migrants commonly affirm that daughters look after the household better than sons (*nyuer bi erzi gujia*). This belief not only refers to women's devotion to their natal families before marriage, but also to their new families after marriage. In other words, concerns for the household are considered paramount for women; all other engagements are seen as extensions of these concerns. While the social expectation that women fulfill their household responsibilities propels them to be creative, it nevertheless also limits their development. This paradoxical situation entails an ongoing process of Yunnanese

21. The term "mother-daughter identification" is derived from Francis L. K. Hsu's "father-son identification" (1967), which refers to the mutual responsibility and privileges between the father and son for the continuity of patriliny. While studies on Chinese descent and family structure tend to focus on father-son identification, mother-daughter identification is often overlooked.

women's interplay with gendered politics characterized by a negotiable gap between the level of ideology and that of reality. This gap reveals their inner strength, with which they reinterpret the prescribed norms with or without betraying them, while it also shows how far the society tolerates the gap.

In line with Saba Mahmood's interpretation of female agency as a capacity for action (2001), Yunnanese women's breaking away from conventional constraints on movement cannot be seen as originating from a personal desire to resist the structure of male domination. Rather, it is centered on the embodied virtues of motherhood and household responsibilities, and their performance primarily aims for the "continuity, stasis, and stability" of these virtues (using Mahmood's words, 2001, 212). Instead of subverting the patriarchal system, they unanimously wish to be born as men in their next lives. (Since starting my research among the Yunnanese migrants in 1994, I have not heard any Yunnanese woman express the opposite wish.) Though the wish seems to be passive, it actually embraces their wisdom in knowing what may be changed and what may not be changed. Their bravery and devotion to their families illustrate their dynamism as well as frustration and pain in an ongoing process of shaping and reshaping their gendered roles. Consequently, the types of borders they have to cross during the course of their travels for economic engagements surpass those of their male counterparts.