



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## 7. Circulations of the Jade Trade: The Duans and the Pengs

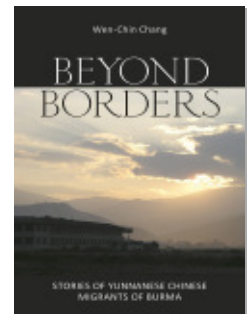
Published by

Chang, Wen-Chin.

Beyond Borders: Stories of Yunnanese Chinese Migrants of Burma.

Cornell University Press, 2015.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.57596>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/57596>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-19 00:46 GMT)

## CIRCULATIONS OF THE JADE TRADE

### *The Duans and the Pengs*

During 2007 and 2008, the transaction from an official auction of jade stones in Yangon was around three to four billion euros; in early 2010, the amount increased to seven to eight billion euros. For the last auction in March 2011, the amount doubled and reached sixteen billion euros. The value of jade stones is soaring, as traders foresee their resource will be exhausted someday.

The demand is increasing.

—DAQING, April 15, 2011, Taipei

In September 2006, I made my first field trip to Guangzhou via Hong Kong in order to extend my earlier research on the jade trade among the Yunnanese migrants of Thailand and Burma that I began in 2000. The purpose of my trip was to research the expansion of the Yunnanese trading networks of the jade business from Burma—where the most precious jadeite in the world is procured—to Guangzhou, current developments in state and non-state trading regulations, new forms of transaction, capital flows, and shipments of jade stones and products. My second field trip to Guangzhou took place the following year when I spent two weeks in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and a few satellite trading nodes around Guangzhou. The Duans and the Pengs, families who were related through marriage and business collaborations, helped arrange interviews for me with other Yunnanese jade traders from Burma and Thailand and local dealers, as well as visits to three major jade companies founded by Yunnanese from Burma

and Thailand. During my stay, I had the opportunity to observe the manufacturing of jade ware, including the cutting of jade stones, the making of designs on cut slates, and carving, plus the trading of jade in street markets, shops, and at organized auctions. Most importantly, the Duans and the Pengs related numerous stories about their lives and trading experiences in Burma, Thailand, Yunnan, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Taiwan. In 2009, through Mr. Peng's connections, I made an additional trip to Ruili, a border entrepôt of Yunnan, adjacent to Muse (Mujie) in northern Shan State in Burma, and then Kunming (the provincial capital) to observe the jade trade for a period of two weeks (Figures 7–1 and 7–2).

Initially, it was through the introduction of relatives of the Duans and the Pengs in Thailand and Burma that I came to know the two families. The meetings with these relatives began in Thailand in 1995. Between 2005 and 2009, I interviewed different members of the Duan and the Peng clans in Burma, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Yunnan, and Taiwan. These meetings and interviews have helped me gain insights into the trading history of the two families. I learned of their ups and downs in relation to external challenges and personal luck, which are considered by traders to be two major determinants, among others, for success in this economic pursuit (Chang 2006b). Based on knowledge of their business developments, as well as of



Figure 7–1. A jade market in Guangzhou



Figure 7–2. A jade market in Ruili

the engagement of other informants in the same practice, I was able to build a detailed picture of this intriguing area of commerce, predicated on the extension of Yunnanese networks by land from Burma to Thailand from the 1960s to the mid-1990s, and from Burma to Yunnan since the mid-1980s, as well as by sea from Yangon to Guangzhou since 2000.

In this chapter, I look into the circulations that have evolved from the trade since 1962,<sup>1</sup> covering both the socialist period in Burma and afterward. After taking power in September 1988, the new junta partially opened the nation's economy for private trade and foreign investment. In 1992, it legalized the jade trade and opened the jade mines in Kachin State for private mining.<sup>2</sup> An exploration of two political periods helps to provide a comparative understanding of the structural changes over time.

---

1. In four other papers, I explore the trading networks and culture of the jade business during the period of the Burmese socialist regime (1962–1988) (Chang 2003, 2004, 2006b) and its historical contingency and continuity (Chang 2011).

2. Burmese jade (or, more specifically, jadeite) deposits are located in Kachin State in upper Burma, especially along the Uru River. Hpakant is the most famous area.

According to Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam, “Circulation is different from simple mobility, inasmuch as it implies a double movement of going forth and coming back, which can be repeated indefinitely” (2003, 2–3); moreover, circulation refers to “more than the movement to and fro of men and goods. . . . Apart from men and goods, many other items circulate in a society (and between a given society and other societies): information, knowledge, ideas, techniques, skills, cultural productions (texts, songs), religious practices, even gods” (p. 2). They use the concept of circulation for analysis of the itinerant cultures in South Asia under colonial rule. In the same vein, this chapter attempts to study the back-and-forth movement of traded commodities (i.e., jade stones, jade products, and machinery), capital, people, information, and knowledge along the trade routes that are maintained through the circuits of Yunnanese connections that link by land and sea the various trading nodes located in Burma, Yunnan, Thailand, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Taiwan. Within this “circulatory regime,” meaning the “totality of circulations” occurring in this large stretch of connected area (ibid., 3), we will discern that the flows are multidirectional. The back-and-forth circulation is not limited between two fixed destinations, but among many possible nodes supported by nexuses of trading that have the potential to shift and expand. I will use the trading history of the Duans and the Pengs as the core source of illumination, supplemented with data from other informants and material, to give a structural picture of the trade.

### Transnational Business Bases of the Duans and the Pengs

“Once my husband [Mr. Duan] and brother-in-law [Mr. Peng] set off together for the jade mines in Hpakant. They had a radio with them. Before reaching their destination, they learned about the demonetization of the Burmese kyat [*dapiào biàn*].<sup>3</sup> My husband then decided to return home, but my brother-in-law still wanted to try his luck in the jade mines and continued his journey alone. Later on he was kidnapped by rebels. The rebels sent a message back for ransom. He was released only after payment of the ransom. Undertaking the trade was very risky.”

---

3. The regime demonetized banknotes respectively in 1964, 1985, and 1987. The event mentioned here is possibly in 1985.

The story was related by Mrs. Duan at a condominium located near the jade market (*yuqi jie*) in Guangzhou in 2006. Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng, who are sisters, bought the apartment together in 2002 and made it one of several bases for the families' transnational engagement in the jade trade. It housed the members of the families whenever they came from other bases to Guangzhou. Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng were the primary residents; other frequent visitors included their husbands, Daqing (the eldest son of the Duans), and Lifan (the eldest daughter of the Pengs). It was a bit crowded when several members of the two families were present.

I was a breakfast guest when Mrs. Duan told me the story of Mr. Peng's kidnapping. We had *babasi* (rice noodles) cooked Yunnanese-style with ground pork and tomatoes and several side dishes, including Yunnanese pickles. The breakfast was prepared by Axiang, a relative of the Duans from Yunnan whose mother had married a cousin of Mr. Duan. Axiang was nineteen years old. Both she and her younger brother had been recruited to work here. They slept in a nearby apartment that Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng rented as their working studio, and every morning Axiang cooked breakfast at the condominium. After breakfast, Mr. Duan made *pu-er* tea (*pu er cha*), a popular fermented tea from Yunnan. He and Mrs. Duan then recounted many stories about their life experiences in Burma, then in Taiwan, and now in Guangzhou. Lifan was present too. Born in Burma, she had moved to Taiwan with her family in 1988 at the age of seven. As she had grown up primarily in Taiwan, her aunt and uncle's stories seemed like amazing adventures to her.

Originally the Duans and the Pengs lived in Burma. The families moved via Thailand to Taiwan in 1988 when the political situation in Burma became unstable. They said that the main reason for moving was their children's education. The Burmese government closed down universities whenever there were strikes. Mr. Peng's parents and other siblings had already moved from Burma to Thailand in the late 1960s and then from Thailand to Taiwan in 1974. Both Mr. Duan and Mr. Peng had visited Taiwan a few times for business, as Taiwan has consistently been a primary consumer society for jade. From 1988 to 1992, the period when the Taiwanese stock market was booming, its rate of jade purchase was the highest among all Chinese societies. It was not difficult for overseas Chinese businessmen to apply for immigration to Taiwan at that time. The Duans and the Pengs purchased condominiums in central Taipei soon after their arrival. Most of their children still live in Taipei.

Mr. Duan's main investment is in jade mining. He owns the mining rights to about one hundred acres in Kachin State (in 2011).<sup>4</sup> He entrusts its management to a nephew (a son of his fourth elder brother) and the husband of a niece (the daughter of his third elder brother). Excavated stones are transported to Mandalay for storage under the purview of another niece (the daughter of his fourth elder brother) who resides in that city. These stones are later transported to Yangon and Naypyidaw (the latter since 2011) for auctions organized by the Burmese government before they are allowed to be exported. The husband of the niece in Mandalay is sent to Yangon to be in charge of the stones. Mr. Duan extended his business to Guangzhou in 2001, around the time many Yunnanese jade traders (mostly from Burma) arrived there. After coming to Guangzhou, he also began a business making jade products. He rents a four-story house in the jade market of Pingzhou. Originally an agricultural village, since 2000 Pingzhou has been transformed into an important town for the auction of jade stones and commerce in jade products, especially bangles. The town is only twenty minutes' drive from Guangzhou; it offers space for the expansion of the jade market and is thus considered a strategic place for developing the jade trade. The local government has built many shops in the market on communal land in the last few years. Many jade companies have been established here since 2005, the major ones founded by the Yunnanese from Burma and Thailand with bases back in Mandalay and Yangon. They organize auctions of jade stones almost once a month. The house Mr. Duan rents is used primarily as a storehouse for the jade stones shipped from Burma that are mostly excavated from his mines in Hpakant. The stones stored in the house are in part entrusted to jade companies for local auctions and in part reserved for making jade products for further sale. There are a few machines in the house for cutting the stones.

As for Mr. Peng, his main focus is on purchasing jade stones and making high-quality jade products for sale. Since 2004, he has been renting a ground-floor shop in a row of buildings in the jade market of Pingzhou, not far from Mr. Duan's storehouse. In it he sells both his products and those of other traders, items such as rings, earrings, pendants, brooches, bead necklaces, and bangles. The sale of other merchants' products earns 5 percent commission. He also rents the fourth floor of the same building for storing purchased stones. His first younger brother, who has a university degree in

---

4. He does not excavate all his mines but rents out a portion of them to other mining bosses.

mining and oil engineering from a Taiwanese university, takes care of the shop with a local friend. This brother joined the business in 1987 and was in charge of a base in Yingjiang, a booming border town in Yunnan, until 2000. He then commuted between Taiwan, Hong Kong, Yunnan, and Guangzhou for several years, partly for joint trade with his brother and partly for his own business, until he was entrusted with the shop in Pingzhou.

Mr. Peng was one of the few Yunnanese who extended business to Hong Kong prior to 1990. He has a firm located in the jade market of Guangdong in Hong Kong that was established with two Hong Kong partners in 1988. Since 2006, he has also been involved in the shipment of jade stones and in providing money transfer services for fellow Yunnanese. Lifen, his eldest daughter, who is in her mid-twenties with a bachelor's degree in hotel management from a college in Switzerland, helps to take care of the shipments and money transfers. The Pengs also have a residential unit in a condominium in Hong Kong. (While referring to Taiwan as the place where their homes are based, the Pengs and Duans travel between Taiwan, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Yangon for the jade trade.)

Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng started their business collaboration in Guangzhou in 2002 with the encouragement of their husbands. Although they were housewives before this undertaking, through the years they had acquired a great deal of knowledge about the trade. They had heard many trade stories from their husbands and had seen the alternations of good and bad fortunes that their husbands and other relatives had endured. As their children grew up, they thought of starting their own business in this already familiar trade. They purchase small sliced pieces of jade stones (*bianjiaoshi*), "leftovers" from larger pieces that have been used for making bangles or other larger pieces, from their husbands at less than market prices, and use them for making small ornaments.

The Duans' eldest son, Daqing, who is in his early thirties, began participating in the trade in 2002 after receiving a master's degree in architecture in Taiwan.<sup>5</sup> His father noted Daqing's interest in the jade business and his talent for evaluating jade stones quickly. While studying at university, Daqing

---

5. Although a few former classmates and he opened an office for architecture design after graduation, his main involvement has been with the jade trade. Lifen's and his higher education differentiates them from most jade traders of their parents' generation, who did not receive much education during a time of instability.



made close friends with Chinese overseas students from Burma. From them he again picked up the Burmese language, which he had stopped using after moving to Taiwan at the age of thirteen. During summer vacations, he would visit his father's jade mines. At first he sold jade products provided by his mother and aunt through a website that he set up for that purpose. The net profit was high, around the same amount he paid for the products. His wife, who has a background in painting, took classes in gem design and soon joined the trade by designing jade products in a modern style that is easily distinguished from conventional bangles and statuettes of Buddha and the goddess Guanyin. Moreover, with the guarantee of genuine and untreated jade stones from the family's jade mines, Daqing and his wife quickly built up their own brand in Taiwan using the latter's English name. In 2006, Daqing opened a gem shop in the bustling shopping area of eastern Taipei that has gone on to do very well. He hired two nieces, also from Burma, to work at the shop. They originally went to Taiwan for further studies, a popular option among ethnic Chinese students in Burma (like Zhang Dage and Ae Maew). Both nieces had completed their undergraduate studies and had acquired several years of work experience elsewhere before being asked to work at the shop. Daqing goes to Hong Kong and Guangzhou regularly to replenish his commodities; he still buys most of the products and semi-finished products from his father, mother, and aunt. Every year he also visits his father's jade mines in upper Burma.

It is clear that the Duans and the Pengs ground their transnational jade business primarily on kinship ties, especially among their own family members and close relatives. This is a common phenomenon in the jade trade, where the expansion of the enterprise draws in increasing numbers of kith and kin. In the case of the Duans and Pengs, their businesses are supported by the movement of participating members at different points. Even the workers who help in the houses and shops in Guangzhou and Pingzhou are recruited from among relatives in Yunnan.<sup>6</sup> Through the business networks, the traded jade stones and products are transported from one node to another. Their transportation is tied to the circulation of trade knowledge with value added at different stages, from excavated rough stones, to polished and cut stones at an auction, to finished products.

---

6. In 2006, only Axiang and her brother were recruited from Yunnan, but in the following year, two more relatives from Yunnan were brought in to work there.

This process accords with Arjun Appadurai's interpretation of the "social lives of things." He claims that "commodities, like persons, have social lives" (1986, 3), and they move in and out of different "regimes of value in space and time" (*ibid.*, 4).

Daqing and his wife are keen to develop, disseminate, and demonstrate their expertise in the jade trade and jade production—the entire process of turning jade stones into finished products, from excavation to production. Daqing does more than simply buy ready-made products from his mother and aunt. He visits jade mines in Hpakant, auctions of jade stones in Yangon, Naypyidaw, and Pingzhou, and auctions of jade products by Christie's and Sotheby's in Hong Kong. His activities resemble those of his predecessors who traveled to various places in order to acquire jade knowledge. In Taipei, he passes on part of his knowledge to his nieces for explanation to clients. In addition, his wife's participation in design contributes to the completion of the final product. To gain an edge over their competitors, Daqing and his wife describe the "social lives" of their commodities—his family's mining sites, procuring process, auctions, and transportation of jade stones and production of jade ware—to their clients both on the website and in the shop. Daqing told me that his shop is the only one in Taiwan that sells products made from family-mined stones.

Although the jade trade is primarily based on kinship ties, it requires local links as well. Earlier I referred to Mr. Peng's firm, cofounded with two local partners in Hong Kong who had previously purchased jade stones he had taken to Thailand. They not only contributed capital, but their local status also helped to facilitate the registration procedures required to set up the firm. Other informants also point out that all the jade companies in Pingzhou that are primarily funded by the Yunnanese from Burma are registered under the names of local partners. Not only is it difficult to use Burmese status for registration in China, but applying for official papers in Burma for business investment abroad is far too troublesome.<sup>7</sup>

Following the introduction of the Duans' and the Pengs' transnational bases for their jade trade, the next section looks into the specific stories of members of the two families, in particular those of Mr. Duan and Mr. Peng, which reveal how they repeatedly encountered external constraints arising

---

7. Local partners' shares tend to be small. The strategy of using their names for registration implies legal risks; but so far I have not heard of actual problems.

from different power structures prior to 1992. The economic activities of these two families break through these restrictions and lead to configurations in their transnational trading enterprises that ensure the fluidity of people, capital, commodities, and trade knowledge and information.

### **Prior to 1992**

#### **Mr. Duan**

Mr. Duan was born in 1947 to a family of the landlord class in Tengchong, Yunnan. In 1951, most of the members of the extended Duan family fled to Burma in order to avoid the Communist class struggle. Some family members joined the KMT guerrillas to continue military campaigns for fighting back in Yunnan. In 1971, Mr. Duan's parents and the family moved from a village in northern Shan State to Taunggyi to avoid the incessant fighting among different ethnic military groups and with the Burmese army. Other members of the extended family were scattered through other parts of Shan State.

In 1972, Mr. Duan started his venture in the Thai-Burmese underground trade by transporting Thai textiles to Burma. In 1973, he went to Mogaung for the first time to buy jade stones. Mogaung was a town located on the railway line joining Myitkyina and Mandalay. Many excavated jade stones were secretly brought here for sale. After General Ne Win took control of the country through a military coup and implemented a series of economic measures to nationalize trade and industry, gemstones were categorized as national properties and banned from private excavation and trade. However, the jade mining area was primarily under the control of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). They supervised jade mining by levying and collecting taxes. Mr. Duan said:

“Prior to 1980, the KIA allowed only indigenous Kachins and Shans to mine while barring Chinese from the venture. Some daring Yunnanese disguised themselves as Shans or Kachins and tried their luck in mining. They had to hide themselves from the KIA as well as the Burmese troops. Most Yunnanese only bought excavated stones in the outlying towns, like Mogaung, Hopin, and Mohnyin. In 1977, I went to the jade mines for the first time to buy jade stones. Carrying some food and merchandise, I

pretended to be a Shan peddler. However, before I reached the mines, two KIA soldiers stopped to question me. Though I was able to speak Shan fluently, having grown up in Shan State, the soldiers were not convinced that I was really Shan. They pointed out my fair complexion. I was in great fear. Fortunately, the soldiers were more interested in the goods I carried than my identity. They took some of my food and let me go. I stayed in Hpakant for six months that time. During the stay, I roamed around the mines to find good jade stones for sale. On my way back, I was unlucky and encountered a fight between the KIA and Burmese troops. I was sitting in a truck at that point, and the passenger next to me was hit in the eye by a bullet. I immediately jumped out of the truck and hid in nearby bushes until the fight stopped. Although it was very risky, I made my way to Mogaung or Hpakant once or twice every year in the late 1970s. Sometimes, I went with my brother-in-law [Mr. Peng] and other friends from Taunggyi.”

One of Mr. Duan’s stepbrothers was a high-ranking officer of the KMT Third Army that had retreated to Thailand. The army often collaborated in the jade trade. Mr. Duan was responsible for buying jade stones in Burma and arranging for their transportation to Thailand, and his stepbrother took charge of contact with the jade companies in Chiang Mai and, later, price negotiations with buyers at the companies. Due to this connection with his stepbrother, Mr. Duan obtained Thai legal status (as Zhao Dashu in chapter 5 did) and was able to move freely in Thailand whenever he entered the country. Prior to 1980, although jade mining was largely undertaken by Kachins and Shans, the jade trade to Thailand was primarily controlled by the Yunnanese because of the extension of their trading networks to Thailand and connections with the KMT troops. Moreover, the jade trade was essentially exclusive to the Chinese; most buyers were from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Without knowledge of the language and Chinese business connections, it was difficult for non-Chinese to enter the trade.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1980s, the KIA relaxed mining controls and allowed the Chinese to mine jade stones, possibly with the recognition that the opening would increase their tax income. Mr. Duan said:

“Many Yunnanese flooded the jade mines as mining bosses or miners in the 1980s. The ethnic Chinese from Guangdong and Fujian were

---

8. In Ruili there are a small number of Burmese Indians who engage in jade trade. Some have stayed in the city for more than ten years and speak Chinese fluently (Egreteau 2011).

largely concentrated in lower Burma. Most of them ran shops and were not involved in the jade trade, which they considered very risky. Soon the number of Yunnanese overtook that of the Kachins and Shans in the jade mines. In 1986, I launched my mining business. In the 1980s, excavation was still purely dependent on human labor, and the mining population increased rapidly. Every evening the center of Hpakant was jammed with miners and traders from nearby mines who came to look for food and fun after the day's labor. However, military conflicts between the KIA and the Burmese army still occurred from time to time. The mining bosses and jade traders had to pay both sides in order to get informal permission to work in the mines. Even then, unexpected dangers arose and sometimes robbed one of life and fortune."

### Mr. Peng

Mr. Peng was born in 1950 in a border village in northern Shan State. Yunnanese called the place Pengxian, and it was composed of several Kachin and a couple of Yunnanese villages.<sup>9</sup> Mr. Peng was a member of the fourth generation born there. His father was the headman (*huotou*) of a Yunnanese village. One of his maternal uncles, the headman of another village, went to Taiwan for military training in the 1950s and was later assigned to lead a troop of sixty soldiers to collect intelligence in northern Burma for the Taiwanese government. Apart from this official assignment, he also engaged in the escort of caravans between Thailand and Burma. A large portion of the caravans from Burma transported jade stones. Mr. Peng joined this uncle's troop briefly in the late 1960s and learned to trade jade stones. Having knowledge of the Kachin language, Mr. Peng purchased jade stones directly from the mines. He explained:

"I went to the jade mines in Hpakant for the first time in 1970. By the early 1970s, I had already built up a name in jade trade circles, as I was able to purchase high-quality stones. The traded stones were uncut; one had to learn to estimate the quality of a stone by evaluating the appearance of its outer crust, such as the colored spots, defects, and texture of the sand of the skin. The lack of guarantee made the trading of jade stones akin to gambling. In 1973, I made a fortune from a deal and bought a house in

---

9. Pengxian is located one and a half days' walk east of Kyugok.

Taunggyi. At that time, we smuggled jade stones to Thailand via Taunggyi. I made good profits in the 1970s, but afterward, I lost heavily in deals for many years. Friends lent me money to keep on going; they trusted me, as I had a good reputation in the trade. . . . In 1987, luck finally knocked on my door again. I purchased a stone with a few friends at the price of 2.4 million kyat. I cut the stone and found it to be of outstanding quality. The piece was not big, but in full green. I took it to Hong Kong the following year and sold it for 19.88 million Hong Kong dollars. I moved my family to Taiwan that year and also established a jade company in Hong Kong with two local partners.”

As the trade was illegal and constrained by the struggle between the government and the KIA, not only did traders gamble on the economic value of jade stones, but also on their own lives in the pursuit of the trade. Apart from his abduction by rebels, Mr. Peng was also jailed twice by the Burmese government for short terms, and was robbed several times while on business trips. He said:

“I was jailed the first time in 1978 with a sentence of six months. . . . On entering the prison, I made myself the big brother [*laoda*]. More than one hundred people were locked in the same room, very crowded. I told the original big brother and his two followers: ‘You follow me from now on. I will have someone deliver half *zuai* of meat every day. You cook for me. We eat together.’ If you had money, life would be OK. If not, your life would be miserable. Those who came before you would bully you, and you wouldn’t even get space to sleep. . . .

“In 1981, I was jailed again. I was already married then. Before being locked up, I was told to spend my money. I bought fifteen hundred cheroots. I planned to use them as presents for the inmates. But then I was put in a cell alone. When a jailer delivered meals, I asked him for a match to light up a cheroot. I then kept on smoking one cheroot after another for twenty-five days. There were many rats in the cell. I had to use the smoke to chase them away. . . .

“A Burmese warden constantly walked back and forth in the corridor outside my cell. He was chanting sutras with a Buddhist rosary in his hand. Once while walking, he asked me: ‘Are you from Taunggyi?’ I replied: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘Do you know officer Thin Maung?’ I replied: ‘Yes, I know him.’ I told him that that official had been transferred to another place. We then started to chat, and later on we became friends. . . .

“One has to live. In the past, one’s life was not worth much. There’s not much you could do in that environment. You had to risk your life. In that country, selling rice was illegal; selling oil was also illegal. Everything belonged to the government. Jade stones were labeled the nation’s property; it was certainly forbidden to trade them. But how could we survive if we did not break the law?”

Engrossed by Mr. Peng’s narration, I asked: “Were you in fear at all in those difficult days?”

“It was not that I was without fear. Fear was part of your life. You simply had to cope with it.” His words correspond to those of the women traders. But like most male traders, in his narration he laid emphasis only on his boldness.

In the mid-1980s, migrant Yunnanese traders started to smuggle jade stones from Kachin State to Yunnan, but the major business remained in Thailand prior to 1995. In 1987, Mr. Peng set up a company in the Yunnanese border town of Yingjiang, despite having little financial leeway at the time. He sent his first younger brother to take care of the business as mentioned earlier, while he himself focused on the trade between Burma and Thailand. His company in Yingjiang sold smuggled stones to local Yunnanese merchants and some from Guangdong. Several informants (including Tangge in chapter 5) pointed out that the trade to Yunnan was an immediate success. Before the Chinese government closed down the border trade in 1949, Yunnan had had a long history of importing Burmese jadeite (Sun 2011). After the Chinese government relaxed economic control in the 1980s, several border towns recovered the jade trade with Burma. However, owing to an interruption of a few decades, local traders did not have sufficient knowledge for the evaluation of jade stones. This resulted in easy sales for the Yunnanese traders from Burma. Informants remarked that in the initial stage (the second half of the 1980s), jade stones with varying degrees of quality could find their market in Yunnan.

### Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng

The sisters Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng are from a Yang family in Kokang. Their parents had nine children, two boys and seven girls. Mrs. Duan is the fourth daughter and Mrs. Peng the fifth. Because of the warring situation in Kokang, the Yangs moved from place to place before finally settling

in Taunggyi in 1970. Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng were married there in 1976 and 1979 respectively.

Prior to marriage, Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng had been unfamiliar with the jade trade. Their father ran a brewery in Kokang; the livelihood of the family was well established before the mid-1960s. They found that life was much simpler in their maiden days; after marriage, their husbands were often away for trade. Each trip took at least two to three months, sometimes half a year or even longer. They were always worried for their husbands' safety and feared irregular checks by official agents at home. The Intelligence Department arranged spies to detect illegal trade in many places, and unannounced checks and interrogations became part of daily life for civilians. In a meeting with Mrs. Duan and Mrs. Peng in Pingzhou during my second trip there, they told of their life in Burma. Mrs. Duan said:

“Every time after my husband left home, I was very anxious for his safety. There was no means of direct communication, but from time to time there would be news about traders being kidnapped or killed on the way. I was so frightened whenever I heard such news; I often went to temples to pray. Once right after the departure of my husband and a few friends for trade, several agents of the Intelligence Department came to my house and inquired about the whereabouts of my husband. I was scared to death. My legs kept shaking. Fortunately, they didn't do anything. . . .

“Another time, my sister [Mrs. Peng] was sent for by the Intelligence Department for questioning. She was scared to death. Luckily she had a former Burmese classmate working there who told her not to be afraid.”

Mrs. Peng added: “It was a frightful experience. An officer asked me if I knew my husband's whereabouts. I said: ‘I don't know. He didn't tell me before leaving.’ He said: ‘You are his wife. How come you don't know where he is?’ I said: ‘I know he's away for trade. He goes to Mandalay first, but I don't know where else.’ ‘What merchandise was your husband dealing with?’ he further asked. I replied: ‘Whatever he can buy. Sometimes rice, sometimes textiles.’ ‘How long do his business trips take?’ ‘Two to three months.’ ‘Where does he go?’ ‘I don't know.’ ‘From whom does he purchase his goods?’ ‘I don't know. I'm just a housewife.’ They kept asking me these questions for many hours.”

Apart from emotional anxiety, women left behind often suffer economic instability. Mrs. Peng said: “Soon after marriage I was pregnant. Four months into my pregnancy, my husband left for Thailand to sell his



jade stones. When he came back, Lifen was already three months old. During my three deliveries, my husband was absent. I had only my sister to attend me. Many times I also endured economic instability. On numerous occasions during our marriage, my husband lost large amounts of money in the jade business. I had to borrow money from my sister, who was the essential support for me.”

Mrs. Duan concluded: “The repressive living conditions in Burma have trained Yunnanese people to be resilient. I still can endure the same hardships if the situation requires.”

Comparatively, while most men tend to emphasize their heroic deeds in the face of austere circumstances, women are more open in revealing their feelings. Mrs. Duan’s and Mrs. Peng’s narrations echo the supportive sisterhood of the two Taunggyi sisters (chapter 6) and disclose an ongoing transformation of their inner life processes from carefree single women to married wives and mothers who not only had to shoulder household responsibilities alone during their husbands’ absence, but also to confront institutional violence that generated overwhelming fear. Their accounts have reconstructed the social dramas in connection with their lived experiences, and they have delineated their agency and affects in response to patriarchal dominance as well as the political hegemony of the ruling junta.

## **After 1992**

The Burmese government opened up jade mining and trading in 1992 when it was able to control the mining area, although the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO, the political organization of the KIA) did not sign a truce with the government until 1994.<sup>10</sup> The KIA’s influence in mining has since become nominal. Informants said that prior to 1998, mining bosses still paid the KIA small annual fees, but thereafter, they only paid gift money occasionally.

In 1992, the government began to sell mining concessions. Each concession was valid for only two years but could be extended annually. The basic unit of a mining area was an acre; its bid started at two thousand euros, and

---

10. The cease-fire talks started in 1991. By then the area was becoming more peaceful (Lemere and West 2011, 150).

only Burmese citizens were entitled to participate in the bidding. Between 1992 and 1995, the government owned 25 percent of the value of excavated stones.<sup>11</sup> In 1996, each concession was changed to three years but without the possibility of extension. If the original mining boss wanted to continue to mine on the same piece of land, he had to submit a new bid. In 2000, the government changed this rule to the current one of giving priority to the existing mining boss. This means that if a competitor offers a higher bid for the new concession term, the government has to inform the current boss and ask him if he is willing to match the rival bid. After excavation, jade stones have to be carried to a nearby customs post for payment of *changkoushui* (tax at the mines), an ad valorem duty of 20 percent, prior to their further circulation. Since the stones are not yet cut, the appraised value tends to be low.

According to informants, the Yunnanese account for about 90 percent of all mining bosses. In 1992, Mr. Duan won the mining bid in three places, totaling more than twenty acres. He hired more than one thousand miners, recruited mostly from southern Burma. One of his relatives noted that local workers have better connections with local political power; it is thus better to hire laborers from faraway places who are comparatively more obedient. By the mid-1990s, the use of excavators, imported mostly from Japan, became popular. The price of a brand new excavator was around US\$160,000 before 2012. With the increased use of machinery, the number of laborers has been greatly reduced. In 2007, Mr. Duan excavated more than thirty acres using only twenty-five excavators and about two hundred workers. Daqing said that his father's mines produce about two hundred tons of rough stones a year, which yield up to five thousand kilos of jade for product making. However, it is the quality of the stones that matters more than the quantity. Apart from the use of machinery, dynamite is applied in mining as well. Every boss wants to excavate as many jade stones as possible during his concession term, so mining takes place both day and night to maximize profit. The environment surrounding the mines is, however, badly affected. The first younger brother of Mr. Peng, who has a degree in mining and oil extraction, said that some places have been dug four

---

11. Later on the government's ownership ceased, but then resumed again. It accounts for 40 to 50 percent.

hundred to five hundred meters deep, resulting in the removal of mountains and diversion of rivers.<sup>12</sup>

The opening of the jade trade in Burma also contributed to a structural shift of the jade market from Chiang Mai to Mandalay. The opportunity to buy jade stones directly in Burma drew increasing numbers of dealers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. Some Yunnanese traders in Burma started to provide brokerage services and to arrange deals between sellers and buyers and the shipment of purchased stones for the buyers. In 1995, the Burmese government issued permission for the establishment of jade companies to take charge of the brokerage. Mining bosses entrusted their stones to the jade companies for sale. At that point because of this law, the jade business in Chiang Mai more or less ended.

From the mid-1960s to the first half of the 1990s, jade companies in Thailand, which were founded on a strong monetary base and connections with different political agencies in Thailand and Burma, played an institutional role that supported the operation of the trade. Specifically, they handled negotiations between traders whenever disputes emerged, regulated informal tax rates, and meted out penalties to those who abused or broke trading agreements. Moreover, because of intense competition, jade companies sometimes had to resolve conflicts among themselves by seeking assistance from the higher levels of the political hierarchy, usually high-ranking Thai officers (see Chang 2004). During a period when the trade was predicated on underground trafficking, such an institutional role was fundamental to facilitate the operation of the jade trade. With the opening of the trade in Burma, the jade market then shifted to Burma, and new jade companies were established in Mandalay, leading to some notable changes. While the jade companies in Thailand were mostly owned by Yunnanese or other ethnic Chinese groups in the country, the new companies are primarily owned by Yunnanese in Burma, who have the advantage of local status and better local knowledge and connections. To a great extent, these companies maintain an institutional role in providing

---

12. A worker in Hpakant confided: "One of the biggest problems in Hpakant is where to throw the sediment from the mining. They destroy a 10,000-foot high mountain and dig 500 feet into the ground, and the question is where to throw the soil? They throw it into the Uru River which raises the floor of the river making the river bank narrow and causing floods" (quoted from <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/bloodjade-red.pdf>).

brokerage services, in terms of adjustments to the tax rates for commission payments and assistance in negotiations when disputes occur between sellers and buyers. However, the former authoritative power of jade companies no longer exists.

Since 1995 there have been five major jade companies (first in Mandalay, then Yangon)—Fuji, Changlong, Jingu, Wenna, and Meiman. All of the bosses are local Yunnanese, except the boss of Jingu, who is Yunnanese from Thailand (but his wife is Yunnanese from Burma). However, whether these Yunnanese have their origins in Burma or Thailand, both sides are actually closely connected through kinship ties, as in the case of the Duans and the Pengs. Apart from these major companies, there have been hundreds of small companies that are mostly run by the Burmese to take care of local transactions. In Mandalay there is also a big jade marketplace (Figures 7-3 and 7-4), which was established by the government around 1998, located on Eighty-Seventh Street between Thirty-Third and Thirty-Fourth Streets, where a large number of Burmese traders composed of different ethnic groups congregate every day. However, informants estimated that local transactions among the Burmese constitute only about 10 to 20 percent of the total jade business; the other 80 to 90 percent is controlled by Yunnanese.

Before 2005, the major jade companies were located on the outskirts of Mandalay. Each one occupied a large piece of land with an imposing building and a big yard that served as storage for jade stones.<sup>13</sup> Each major jade company was backed by strong capital and helped sell jade stones from different owners for 5 percent commission. (Some jade companies were involved in mining as well.) The companies also provided loans to familiar mining bosses with the tacit agreement that when good stones were procured they had to be sold through the lending company. The loans were later repaid at an interest rate of 1.5 percent. In order to attract buyers from abroad, each jade company provided a range of useful services, including the booking of airline tickets, local transportation, hotel reservations, shopping trips for jade stones at different companies (not only its own), arrangements for paying taxes, and the shipment of purchased stones. Both

---

13. Take Changlong as an illustration. The company space is 150 feet by 320 feet. The stones placed in the yard are large pieces with a lower grade; those of high quality are deposited inside the building.



Figure 7-3. The jade market in Mandalay



Figure 7-4. The jade market in Mandalay

jade stone sellers and buyers could visit a company at any time, not necessarily for business, often just to pass the time by chatting, smoking, playing mahjong, and eating. Local Yunnanese traders and those from Thailand were especially keen to play golf as a means of gambling. One day's stake for a player could amount to several million kyat. These leisurely pursuits contributed, in effect, to capital circulation; moreover, they were useful occasions for learning trading information and meeting potential trading partners, especially when one was interested in buying a high-priced piece but lacked sufficient capital. In 2005, the Burmese government issued a new regulation demanding that all export stones be sold first at public auctions (*gongpan*) in Yangon (Figure 7-5). As a result, the major jade companies moved from Mandalay to Yangon, and naturally the trade shifted there. Nonetheless, their services have remained by and large the same. (In October 2010, the Burmese government moved the auction venue again to its new capital, Naypyidaw. Consequently, several jade companies have established offices there.)

In the past, while the jade stones sold in Chiang Mai were often uncut, the stones sold in Burma now have mostly been cut through (*minghuo*). This is related to the fact that prior to 1992, both the mining and trafficking



Figure 7-5. A jade stone auction in Yangon

of jade stones in Burma were illegal. The high risk of engaging in the jade business consequently contributed to increased gambling on the trade. Both sellers and buyers staked their luck on the small quantity of jade stones safely brought to Thailand. However, following the opening of the trade, jade stones have been procured more easily, thanks also to the use of machinery. The large quantity of jade produced thus reduces the former emphasis on gambling. Foreign dealers are able to fly to Burma to buy jade stones, and they prefer to see cut stones before making purchases. However, among the Yunnanese, the trade in uncut stones still exists.

The Burmese government and the Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Company Ltd. (a Burmese military corporation) alternately organize three auctions annually, where they sell the stones for foreign currency.<sup>14</sup>

---

14. Prior to 2004, the currency used at the auction was American dollars; but following the American sanctions on Burma imposed in 2004 (based on the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003), the currency has changed to euros.

Almost all of them have been cut, and one can easily evaluate their quality. According to a state regulation in Burma, only the stones purchased or bid upon by foreign buyers with foreign currency are allowed to be taken abroad after payment of a tax (also in foreign currency). However, many Yunnanese traders, like Mr. Duan and Mr. Peng, hold various nationalities, including Burmese, Thai, and Taiwanese, that allow them to export their stones from Burma and move in these countries (as well as to China) freely. (Those who do not hold a foreign identity usually ask for help from qualified relatives or friends or China / Hong Kong traders.)

In terms of tax payment, those who purchased stones at jade companies before 2005 had to pay an additional levy of 10 percent of the selling price at the customs house in Yangon prior to their exportation. The jade companies took care of the tax and shipment. In order to pay a lower tax, all jade companies under-declared the sold price. After the Burmese government issued the regulation stipulating that only stones sold at public auctions can be exported, the purchased stones have been taxed at 10 percent of the auctioned price without the possibility of negotiation. In this way, greater revenue income is guaranteed.<sup>15</sup> Despite strict regulations, underground trafficking of jade stones and products continues via the Burma-Yunnan border. It is difficult to ascertain the proportion of smuggled goods, but Mr. Peng estimated that it may constitute 20 percent of total jade sales.<sup>16</sup>

The sudden regulation change in 2005 at first had a strong impact on many other traders' enterprises. Foreign dealers could no longer buy jade stones at the jade companies, and mining bosses could not ship their stones directly to Guangzhou. Their goods were thus held up in Burma and they

---

15. The procedure for payment is as follows: After winning a bid at the auction, the buyer has to transfer the total amount of the bid price to the government's account. After the deduction of 10 percent for tax payment, the government then transfers equivalent "foreign exchange certificates" (FEC, also known as fake foreign currency) to the seller's account. The seller can either sell them to other traders in the import business, or use them to buy products from abroad. (In Burma, one can only import foreign commodities with FEC.)

16. Informants consistently said that jade mine bosses prefer to sell jade stones via auctions because intensive bidding guarantees a good price. The quantity of smuggled jade via border entrepôts like Ruili and Yingjiang is comparatively small. Moreover, the smuggled jade is mostly medium and low quality.



could not secure sufficient capital in the short term for reinvestment. In Mr. Duan's case, his mining business demands capital for buying fuel, payments to workers, and the payment of taxes at customs posts in the mining area. He had to seek financial support from relatives in different places. Since the change, he has had to bid on his own stones at the auctions if he wants to export them to Guangzhou for his business there.

Following rapid economic development in China and its increasing demand for jade products, most major jade companies in Burma have extended their business to Pingzhou. The extension has enhanced their competitive capacity in brokerage services. The bases in Burma take care of tax payments and shipment, while those in Pingzhou receive the goods, arrange tax payments there, and hand the goods to customers.<sup>17</sup> The jade companies in Pingzhou also organize alternating auctions, as mentioned earlier. They have developed clear rules regarding participation fees, the service charge rate, and the commission rate. The jade auctions, whether in Yangon, Naypyidaw, or Pingzhou, are distinctive sites where intensified circulations of commodities, capital, people, and information take place. Jade stones are brought from different sources and attract bidders from various countries. The bidding price for high-quality jade is often hundreds of thousands of euros, which usually attracts group bids backed by accumulated capital. Bidders use mobile phones to contact absent partners to discuss bid prices and exchange information. Each auction lasts several days to a week.

In 2006, I went to Yangmeicun in Jieyang County, four hours by bus from Guangzhou, to observe the jade trade there. By Mr. Duan's arrangement, I met a local dealer, Mr. Xia, who took me around to visit the jade market and an auction that was taking place (Figure 7–6). The auctions of jade stones in Jieyang or Pingzhou resemble those in Yangon: they are silent; bidders place their statements of offered prices in boxes, and at the end, the boxes are opened and those who have offered the highest amounts win the bids. The process of opening the boxes and checking the price statements is filmed and shown simultaneously on a big screen, where bidders can watch the proceedings.

---

17. For shipment, a jade company contacts a shipping service company like Mr. Peng's.



Figure 7-6. A jade stone auction in Jieyang

The Jieyang traders are mostly from Yangmeicun, originally a small village. The residents are Chaozhou, and over 80 percent of them are involved in the jade trade. Since the mid-1980s, when jade stones were smuggled from Burma to Yunnan, Jieyang people have gone to Yunnan to buy them for making products. Informants from Yangmeicun recalled that their ancestors during the Qing period had already been involved in this economic activity.<sup>18</sup> Each family house is like a small factory, where family members work on cutting and carving jade stones. The village has become well known for the sale of high-grade jade products since 2000. Moreover, the villagers are known for their bidding on high-priced jade stones in

---

18. Historically, from the time of the Ming period, the jade stones from upper Burma were transported to Yunnan by means of mule caravans, and then farther north to the Chinese court in Beijing (Chen 1966, 86; Sun 2000, 134–54; Xia 1948, 77–78). At the end of the Qing dynasty, sea transportation of jade stones to China was also undertaken because of the easing of restrictions on coastal trade; most of the high-quality precious stones made their way from Yangon to Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. The medium-quality stones were still transported by land to Yunnan (TCXZ 1995, 413; Xia 1948, 107). The Yangmeicun villagers may have been involved in working on jade stones as a result of this sea transportation.

Yangon and Naypyidaw auctions. Whereas dealers from Hong Kong and Taiwan were the primary jade stone buyers prior to the mid-1990s, those from Yangmeicun in Jieyang have become the new leading group of buyers with their superior number of participants and amount of capital.<sup>19</sup>

Seeing Jieyang people play the leading role in the jade product business, I asked several Yunnanese merchants in Guangzhou if the former would overtake the Yunnanese in the jade trade. They said that the economic force of the traders from China is superior to that of the Yunnanese from Burma, and they have thus predominated in buying jade stones at auctions and making and selling jade products in China. However, on account of their local status and intra-group connections, the mining business and brokerage are still controlled by the Yunnanese traders of Burma. In comparison, the Yunnanese traders of Thailand are no longer as active as their counterparts in Burma. This is partly due to the shift of the jade market as analyzed above, and partly because Thai society offers more diverse career opportunities to the younger generation of Yunnanese migrants, unlike in Burma, where career choices are limited and the jade trade remains an attractive business for young people.

Nevertheless, as the social, political, and economic situation in Burma is unstable, the continuity of the trade—as well as other economic activities in Burma—is uncertain. The government occasionally announces sudden halts to the export of jade stones, sometimes due to political considerations, at other times simply because it does not have enough staff to administer the exports, normally after auctions.<sup>20</sup> Also, the government changes trading policies and regulations every now and then without warning. This compels traders to continually adopt new strategies or make structural shifts. Furthermore, the international economic sanctions on Burma have had a negative impact. The gem trade is criticized as being a major

---

19. In 2002, more than fifty Yangmeicun villagers collaborated to bid for a jade stone with the price of about seventy million RMB in a Yangon auction. There are about four thousand traders from China at each jade stone auction. Since 2012, Jieyang traders have taken chartered airplanes from Jieyang to Naypyidaw to participate in bidding at the auctions.

20. In October 2004, after the arrest of the former prime minister Khin Nyunt on charges of corruption, the government halted the export for three months. In May 2012, because of continuous fighting between the Burmese army and the KIA, the government announced a halt to jade mining, and so far has not lifted the ban. In 2012 (March) and 2013 (July), there was only one auction each year in Naypyidaw.

source of foreign currency for the Burmese government (Cho 2008; Saw Yan Naing and Echo Hui 2014; 8088 for Burma 2008).<sup>21</sup> In response to international appeals, the banks in Hong Kong, which formerly helped transfer money to the Burmese government's account for the jade trade, stopped the service in August 2006. Traders were pressured to look for alternatives to cope with the situation. Based on his knowledge of transnational trade and his numerous connections, Mr. Peng embarked on the business of money transfer. He found a particular bank in Singapore that was willing to help. Neither he nor his daughter revealed how this is done, but they emphasized that their new involvement is meant to help fellow traders carry on the trade. In their view, the legality of the practice may be decided by different national or international political entities, but these external power structures do not have the ability to stop this regional trade, which has been undertaken by their predecessors for many centuries.

## Circulation

The stories of the Duans and the Pengs highlight the economic agency of the Yunnanese traders in Burma in combating subjugation by the state. Their mobility connects them with external markets and keeps them conscious of new developments. Concretely, their venture to the jade mines and extension of the jade trade to Chiang Mai, Yunnan, and Guangzhou have resulted in the circulation of people, commodities, capital, information, techniques, and trade knowledge. In terms of human circulation, we learn of traders' extensive travels and recruitment of their family members and close kin. Yunnanese merchants commonly acknowledge the connection between traveling and the accumulation of knowledge of the jade trade. Before receiving mining and trading permission from the KIA, many Yunnanese traders like Mr. Peng and Mr. Duan had already risked visits to the mining area. They stayed there for a few months or longer and shopped around the mines for ideal stones. They called this search "roaming the holes" (*guang dongzi*). The process of visiting the jade mines

---

21. Western governments have removed most economic and political sanctions on Burma following the Burmese government's democratic reforms since 2011, but the US government still maintains its ban on gem imports from Burma (Eckert 2013).

is important as it provides chances to learn the distinctions among jade stones according to their mines of origin. Informants confided that skilled traders are able to tell which mine a stone is from by looking at its surface and feeling the texture of the crust. The surface evaluation relates to further appraisal of the quality contained within. When the jade trade was extended to Yunnan in the mid-1980s, local buyers were not able to make good evaluations because of their initial lack of trade knowledge, even when stones were cut.

With respect to circulation of commodities, the outflow of jade stones was accompanied by the inflow of contraband merchandise from Thailand and China. Before the opening of the jade trade in Burma, many jade traders, especially those with smaller capital, had to run both import and export trafficking in order to maximize profits. After selling their stones in Thailand or China, they purchased local goods for the trip back to Burma, as shown in chapter 5. In addition, if we treat labor as a type of commodity (McKeown 2011), jade mining in Kachin State has driven waves of migrant workers from the south to the north, especially before the use of machinery was popularly applied. (Of course, we can also treat this phenomenon as the circulation of people.)

Closely related to the flow of goods and human beings is the circulation of capital. Both mining and trading jade stones require investments of money. There were different ways to activate this circulation prior to the establishment of Inwa Bank in Hpakant in 1999. The simplest one was that traders or mining bosses carried money with them to the jade mines. However, the stay took at least several months to half a year. After the money was used up, traders or mining bosses had to borrow money from local peddlers, shop owners, or money creditors. This money-lending business was mostly run by women, as exemplified by Qiu Dajie and Zhou Dajie in chapter 6. After lending money to traders or mining bosses, the creditors left the mines and went to the borrowers' homes to collect debts plus interest with written acknowledgments of indebtedness. This was a risky undertaking, as the lenders could have been robbed on the way. Moreover, some debtors refused to pay their debts or disappeared altogether, as Qiu Dajie's story reveals. Informants remarked that it was comparatively safer for women to take up this job because their traveling attracted less attention. This may have been because traditionally, most petty traders in the country had been women; their movement with traded goods was regarded as common. Yet,

a male jade trader confided to me that while all men wanted to make fortunes from jade deals, they despised engagement in money lending.

Since the establishment of the Inwa Bank in Hpakant, people have turned to its service for money transference, which is said to be safer and the service charge lower than previous underground transfers. However, the opening of jade mining by the government and the increasing need for greater amounts of capital investment have limited investment possibilities. Prior to 1992, anyone with a small amount of capital could participate in a mining venture secretly. After choosing a site that was not being worked by other people, the investor could begin mining. He usually hired a team of three to four people to dig one pit. Unavoidable costs included taxes to the KIA and food and board for the miners. Mining tools were primitive, limited to hoes, spades, shovels, and drills. The mining boss tried his luck until his capital was used up. By comparison, since 1992, only those with large amounts of capital are able to enter the mining enterprise and meet the requirements of both bidding for jade mines and buying machines.

In terms of the circulation of information, the movement of caravans between Thailand and Burma functioned as the primary carrier for both oral and written messages (as referred to by Zhang Dage in chapter 5). News from different places was disseminated in this way. As Mrs. Duan noted, there would occasionally be news about traders being kidnapped or killed along the way. In addition, there is the circulation of techniques, such as importation of machinery. Daqing mentioned to me that a Japanese delegation from an excavator company came to Burma in 2010 because Burma had become the company's biggest client.

In an essay investigating the circulation of copper and cotton between Southwest China, upper mainland Southeast Asia, and Southeast China from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Giersch (2011) stresses the need to place regional history in a larger global framework in order to build a dynamic picture of the circulatory regimes. The research leads him to conclude that human institutions, networks, and historical events were the major factors in shaping the fluid economic geography of the trades in question. In line with his viewpoint, this chapter also attests to the fact that the circulation of the jade trade has no fixed geographical space or territorial boundaries. The circulatory regime is affected by ethno-social, political, economic, and technological forces, and it has the potential for constant shifting and expansion. Each set of forces may be further divided

into different levels—local, national, transnational, and international. In response to these various factors, the Yunnanese traders resort to personal networks, grounded on kinship ties, as well as institutional connections supported by the jade companies, to facilitate the operation of the trade. In other words, the pattern of their business organization is predicated both on horizontal relationships among traders themselves and hierarchical affiliation among the traders and the jade companies. Before the opening of trade in Burma, the latter aspect was especially distinct.

From the socialist period to the present, the social life of the jade trade has undergone a series of changes. Modern conveyance by vehicle, ship, and air that guarantees speedy and larger-quantity delivery has replaced the mule caravans for transportation of jade stones. Nevertheless, beneath the veneer of modern technology, unsettling undercurrents infiltrate political confrontation, economic conflicts, and environmental disputes. These multifarious tensions have complicated the “totality of circulations” of the jade trade. Strident condemnations against Yunnanese economic dominance and cliental relationship with the military junta from time to time appear in the media and reinforce xenophobic sentiments among the indigenous, especially in cities. This antagonistic tendency parallels the former anti-Chinese trends in Burma as well as in other Southeast Asian countries (Coppel 1983; Purcell 1960; Skinner 1957; Wickberg 1965) and creates an air of uncertainty in Burma. Digging increasingly deeper into the ground to procure the gradually diminishing quantities of jade stones seems to bring to the surface ever more intricate problems.