"A Motley Throng:" Social Change on Southwest China's Early Modern Frontier, 1700-1880

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C. PAT GIERSCH

Introduction

Shi Shangxian was the youngest son of an impoverished Han (ethnic Chinese) family living in eighteenth-century Yunnan Province. As a boy, he was sold to another Han family for the purpose of marrying one of the family's daughters. Although there is no record of his married life, it apparently was not a happy one. Shi left his wife in 1748, never to return, and drifted southwestward toward the Burmese frontier to engage in commerce between the booming Munai mining region and the Tai polity of Keng Tung (now part of Burma). Shi eventually remarried, this time to an indigenous woman who belonged to one of the local Tai or upland tribes.[1] Thus far, Shi's story is unexceptional. By the mid-eighteenth century, as many as one hundred thousand Han lived in mining communities along the Yunnan frontier (ZPZZ, 1733–2, Zhang Yunsui QL 11/5/9). Han men often married indigenous women, to the consternation of Qing officials who feared the political ramifications of intermarriage (ZPZZ, 142–1, Fuheng *et al.* QL 35/1/19). Shi, however, emerged from obscurity in 1765 when he and his father-in-law, a petty local leader, sided with Burma during the frontier wars of 1765–70 and attacked Qing territory. Shi, the Han ally of the

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[1] "Tai" refers to groups speaking Tai dialects. It is therefore differentiated from "Thai," one such group. In China, the Tai are referred to as Dai.

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Burmese, was later captured by Cao Xiu, the son of an indigenous "native official" (*tusi*) whose militia was patrolling the frontier at the behest of the Qing state.[2]

Shi's story was important to Qing officials because it confirmed their worst fears: a Han had migrated to a remote region and turned on the imperial state; he was a *Hanjian*, a cultural criminal and a political traitor. Shi's and Cao's lives are of historical interest because they expose a world in which social and political affiliations crossed what moderns tend to think of as the hard boundaries of state and ethnicity. In the early modern Qing empire, neither identities nor territorial boundaries necessarily conformed to twentieth-century conceptions.[3] Cao Xiu, in fact, cannot be classified using our categories of ethnicity. He was from Yibang, a tea-producing region of Sipsong Panna (Ch. Xishuangbanna), where his father held a hereditary ruling position recognized by the Qing state. Historians sometimes classify the Cao family as Bulang, a Mon Khmer-speaking group (Gong 1992, 602). Others simply refer to the Caos as "indigens" (*benren*), thereby making no commitment to ethnic category. The family itself apparently claimed descent from a Han ancestor but also intermarried frequently with nearby Tai aristocrats (Wu, Chai, and Wang 1985, 152, 155).

The significance of the Shi-Cao encounter becomes clearer when it is linked to fundamental changes occurring throughout the Qing empire. In eighteenth-century Yunnan and other frontiers, the Qing state pursued policies of expansion that would produce a vast empire. Concurrently, Han pioneers such as Shi Shangxian arrived in unprecedented numbers, though not always with the blessing of imperial authorities. What resulted from this powerful mix of military conquest and Han migration? Using case studies from Yunnan's Southwest Crescent (Figure 1), this paper offers some answers. In doing so, it considers Qing officials, Han migrants, and frontier indigens and their involvement in four aspects of social change: shifts in demographics, transformations in the political and cultural institutions of frontier towns, the creation of personal networks for long-distance commodities trade, and alterations in language and identity due to intermarriage and cross-cultural interactions. Before addressing these issues, however, we need to consider how scholars have examined Qing frontiers in general and the Southwest frontier in particular, generally overlooking the importance and agency of migrants and indigens.

The State of the Field

Previous studies of the Qing-era frontier have tended to focus on imperial policy. Careful studies have explained the mechanics of imperial government—how the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) states invested indigenous leaders as native officials or clients, thus grafting the imperial state onto existing indigenous political institutions. Throughout much of the early modern Southwest, the empire relied heavily on indigenous clients to defend frontiers, keep the peace, and collect (often nominal) taxes.

Native officials provided an inexpensive alternative to regular Qing garrisons and civil installations, but they also had their weaknesses (from the Qing point of view),

[2]GZDQL, 27:63, Liu Zao and Daqi QL 30/12/19; JXD, QL 31, Fu, Yin, Liu to Yang and Liu QL 31/2/22; ZPZZ, 115–4, Yang Yingju QL 31/3/29; ZPZZ, 115–3, Yang Yingju and Tang Pin QL 31/7/20.

[3]For identity in Qing times, see Crossley 1990 and 1999. For warnings about projecting modern nation state boundaries into the past, see Thongchai 1994 and Giersch 1998.

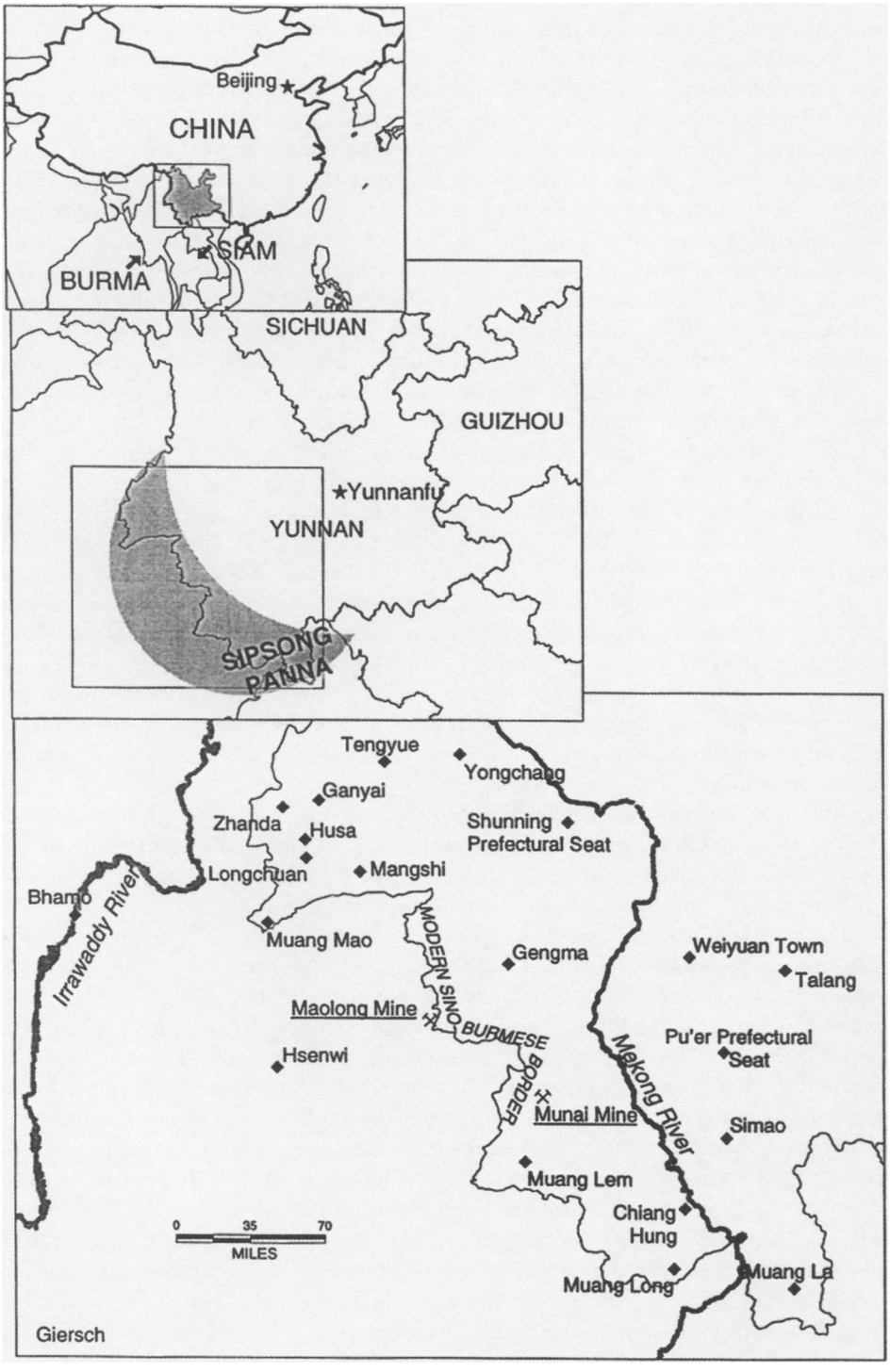

Figure 1. The Southwest Crescent frontier (modern state boundaries added).

including political agendas and cultural practices that did not coincide with those of Beijing. These differences were particularly galling to the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1723–35) and his cadre of reform-minded Yunnan officials. During their watch in the bloody 1720s, the Qing state violently asserted greater control over southwestern clients by removing many native officials in order to replace them with standard imperial officials (the infamous *gaitu guiliu* policy). The general consensus is that the Qing successfully increased imperial control over southwestern frontier indigens during this period; the cost in lives and expenses, however, was great (She 1947; Wiens 1967; Smith 1970; Huang 1974; Gong 1992; Herman 1993). Afterwards, Qing officials tended to pursue less brutal policies, such as providing imperial education, in order to extend hegemony over those indigenous communities still intact (Rawski 1979, 33–4; Rowe 1994; Herman 1997). The Qing state, however, never fully abandoned recourse to violence and *gaitu guiliu*.

In brief, scholarship on the southwestern frontier emphasizes the imperial state as actor, and this approach has proven successful in exploring how Qing imperialism helped integrate more fully a rugged, remote region. Yet this approach also has weaknesses: it reinforces a view of the state as the only historically important actor on the frontier, it tends to overlook the importance of migrants, and it may lead to the conclusion that indigenous communities simply became part of "China." Few western historians of the Qing Southwest have carefully integrated indigens and migrants into their analysis. An exception is Herold Wiens, who, despite an impressive grasp of the ethnic intricacies of frontier Yunnan, nevertheless portrayed Han migrants and the imperial state as a monolithic "force" or giant wave, rolling across the Southwest to conquer, "sinicize," and "swamp . . . all the alien peoples and cultures in their path" (Wiens 1967, xi-xii, 332). His prediction that the inevitable absorption of frontier Yunnan's non-Han population would be complete once Han Chinese solved the technological problems associated with operating in remote, tropical areas (Wiens 1967, 334–41) sums up this view. As in the case of the mythical "vanishing" Indian in American history, however, diverse frontier peoples have neither given up the ghost nor disappeared from the Chinese political and cultural landscape; and, until we examine carefully the historical agency of migrants and indigens, we will have trouble climbing out of the sinicization quagmire.

The limitations of the sinicization paradigm are twofold. First, it assumes a single Han culture to which one might acculturate, thereby concealing the significant tensions between migrants and officialdom, popular and imperial cultures. It also ignores the facts that the Qing imperial family were not Han, but Manchus, and that many of the high-level officials who served in eighteenth-century Yunnan were Manchu or Han-martial bannermen.[4] Recent scholarship carefully documents the frequently strained relations between migrants and state on the Qing-era Taiwan and Xinjiang frontiers (Shepherd 1993; Millward 1998). Yet tensions between state and migrants had occurred under Han-led regimes, too; according to Richard von Glahn, "Peasants, landlords, merchants—and even more so, local warlords, frontier officials, and the central government—harbored separate and often competing interests" on the eleventh-century Sichuan frontier (von Glahn 1987, 3–4). These insights apply equally to early modern Yunnan, where Qing officials were frequently skeptical about uncouth or even subversive Han transfrontiersmen.

[4]For the banner affiliations of Yun-Gui governors general and Yunnan governors, see Giersch 1998, 294–95 or Qian 1980, 2:1386–1429, 1575–1630.

A second weakness in the sinicization argument is the assumption that indigenous communities will inevitably dissolve in a flood of Chinese values when faced with Han migrants. Recent studies have argued eloquently against applying uncritically the deeply-ingrained concept of sinicization to Manchus or other minorities living in the Qing and later periods.[5] As Pamela Crossley argues, "The barest implications of 'sinicization' were that Chinese culture was somehow autochthonous, rigid and exclusive, and in contact with other worlds either obliterated or was obliterated. Secondarily, it was implied that through nothing much more subtle than the sheer charisma of Chinese culture, peoples were attracted to China and its society . . . [and] were consumed in the flames of [sinicization]" (1990, 2). She urges us to look for "China's social rhythms" at markets, temples, and in commercial exchange in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of social transformations (1990, 3). The case of Shi Shangxian, a petty merchant plying the rugged frontier trade routes, suggests the possibilities of a range of identity choices for migrants (Shi's marriage into an indigenous family) and locals (Cao's willingness to arrest Shi for the Qing). Because this case reflects the complexity of political and social alliances on the Yunnan frontier, it is necessary to discard the concept of sinicization and search for more advanced analytical concepts.

Recent scholarship that assesses the Qing state as a sophisticated early modern, colonial empire provides some guideposts in this search. Qing China participated in the early modern world since it engaged in war, diplomacy, and trade with other states, and it, like emerging European and Middle Eastern empires, used newly developed technologies to administer and legitimize globally its colonial acquisitions (Perdue 1998, 256; Hostetler 2000). That Qing empire builders actively shaped the early modern world is important because it was on this early modern foundation that modern Asian nations arose. Qing officials, however, were not alone in this endeavor. The Qing-Burma frontier wars, in which Shi and Cao fought, were crucial struggles in a long process of delineating Burmese, Chinese, and Siamese state control over the diverse peoples and rugged lands of the Sino-Southeast Asia boundaries (a process perhaps still underway in northern Burma). Thus, the Burmese and Siamese were active participants as well. Yet, early modern states such as the Qing, Burmese, and Siamese did not exercise the same degree of sovereignty over frontier regions as do modern nations. Few demarcated political boundaries existed between the Qing and other large states until the 1890s. Instead, at the large states' outer limits were a complex array of smaller polities that often maintained some degree of autonomy (Leach 1960; Wyatt 1982, 159–60; Lieberman 1984, 55, 132; Thongchai 1994, 81–88). Among these were indigenous elites whom the Qing regime claimed as native officials. Scholars of Qing history must therefore recognize, as our colleagues in Southeast Asian history have long known, that frontier peoples had access to cultural and political reservoirs other than the Qing empire. This realization should help diminish the importance of sinocentrism and sinicization, while justifying the effort to explore the historical agency of frontier peoples.

Qing China was a colonial empire because it ruled a variety of territories and peoples using a multiplicity of institutions and techniques (Perdue 1998, 255; Heuschert 1998, 311). Cao Xiu's role in Shi's arrest reminds us that in many regions indigenous elites often did the heavy lifting necessary to maintain empire. This was

[5]Crossley 1990, Elliott 1990, and Rawski 1996 critique sinicization. Modern China's minorities have forged new senses of community in the crucible of their ties with the majority and the state; see Harrell 1995, 27–34.

true of *jasaks, begs,* and *tusi* working under the Court for Administration of the Outer Provinces (Lifan Yuan) in Xinjiang, aboriginal troops quelling Han uprisings on Taiwan, and the native officials used throughout the Southwest.[6] Many recent studies analyze the diversity of Qing frontier policy and practice. At the same time, we are learning that the court, particularly under the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736–95), innovated in ways that made the Manchu Qing quite distinct from the Ming before it (Rawski 1996; Millward 1998). The idea of sinicized Manchus bringing Chinese Confucian culture to the entire empire is an image slowly (and mercifully) receding from our discipline.

For all the insights that this new "Manchu-centered perspective" has provided, however, the emphasis is still on officials and their policies. In a strong effort to begin integrating our knowledge of various Qing frontiers, John Shepherd concluded that "the state adopted different policies for different frontiers, based on its assessment of strategic significance, revenue potential, and control costs" (1993, 398). Yet despite the fact that Shepherd's Taiwan study carefully analyzes social and economic changes at the local level, his comparative summary, as important as it is, consigns indigenous communities and immigrants a passive or, at best, indirect role in frontier change.

A Complementary Approach

One way to address this problem of historical agency is to combine insights culled from recent Qing frontier history with an analytical approach developed by Richard White, a historian of Native American–European relations. White's seminal book, *The Middle Ground*, "places Indian peoples at the center of the scene" instead of simply surveying European and Euro-American policy toward Indians. The study examines relations between Algonquian Indians and the French, British, and American empires in the North American Great Lakes Region from 1650 to 1815. White argues that traditional intellectual tools have left us unable to perceive the complexity of cross-cultural contact. Simple stories of European conquest and Indian assimilation on one hand, or Indian cultural persistence on the other, "miss a larger process and a larger truth . . . Contact was not a battle of primal forces in which only one could survive. Something new could appear" (White 1991, ix). The book's title and central concept, middle ground, describes how Europeans and Algonquians created new practices of interaction, bridging cultural gulfs through innovation and misunderstanding as both sides adapted old institutions and traditions to meet new requirements (chap. 1 and 2). In other words, both sides were agents and objects of transformation—an idea that represents a breakthrough in frontier studies.

Critics have noted some potential pitfalls to this approach. On one hand, middle ground is an elastic concept that addresses several aspects of the frontier at once. Sometimes it refers to the geographical location, at other times it connotes a process of ethnic mixing, and at still other times it describes the changing material and political bases of relations among frontier groups (Jennings 1992, 230–33). These multiple meanings, however, are what make the concept powerful: "middle ground" unites in a single image both place and process. Yet we must be careful not to use the idea of a middle ground to transform "the frontier into the birthplace of cultural

[6]For Xinjiang, see Di Cosmo 1998, 297–99 and Millward 1998, 150–51. For Taiwan, see Shepherd 1993, 146–48.

pluralism" (Herman 1999, 288). Violence frequently flares in any situation in which power over people, land, or other resources is contested. As White explains of the Great Lakes region, "This world was not Eden, and it should not be romanticized. Indeed, it could be a violent and horrifying place. But in this world the older worlds of the Algonquians and of various Europeans overlapped, and their mixture created new systems of meaning and exchange" (ix-x).

With these caveats in mind, we can analyze conflict and contact between Yunnan indigens, the Qing imperial state, and Han migrants under the middle ground rubric, for they, too, "overlapped" and "created new systems of meaning and exchange" from older institutions. As imperial soldiers and Han migrants moved into the Southwest Crescent, they encountered diverse groups that could not be easily displaced. Many native officials, for instance, were Tai-speaking elites who pledged allegiance concurrently to the Qing and other powerful states (primarily Burma), and they ruled polities with elaborate governing institutions and recorded histories that spanned centuries (Wyatt 1982, 159–60; Thongchai 1994, 81–82; Giersch 1998, 14–15; Jiang 1983). Their Tai subjects farmed rice paddies in the river valleys. At higher altitudes lived Mon–Khmer– and Tibeto–Burman–speaking hill peoples who had their own customs (You 1994, 528–62). Han settlers descended from Ming-era migrants were also scattered throughout the region. Yet geography, religion, politics, and trade oriented this region toward Burma and Siam more than China.[7] As the following section explains, trade routes through the Crescent linked Yunnan to Southeast Asia, a fact that, as Chiranan Prasertkul has pointed out, most scholars have overlooked because they are influenced by William Skinner's macroregions approach and its inability to account for economic ties outside of "agrarian China" (Chiranan 1989, 33–39; Skinner 1977, 212).[8]

Thus, frontier Yunnan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like the Great Lakes region during the seventeenth and eighteenth, was a "place in between: in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires" (White 1991, ix). It was where the standard Qing bureaucracy, used in China-proper, met the native official institutions of the frontier. It was where Han migrants, searching for land and livelihood, met the diverse inhabitants of hill and valley. And it was where people from diverse backgrounds negotiated commercial, political, and social relationships, thus creating new patterns of interaction.

The Demographics of Change

Large numbers of Han people began arriving in the Crescent during the Ming period. It is impossible to determine how many Han came to the Crescent at this time, but James Lee has documented three large immigration waves between 1391 and the 1580s. Using his figures, we can estimate that well over 140,000 Han

[7]Noted Ming traveler Xu Hongzu felt the pull of Burma when he visited Tengyue in 1639 (Xu 1985, 2:1130–31). Tai chronicles such as *Leshi* testify to close relations with Burma (see Giersch 1998, 141–54). Close connections between the Crescent and Southeast Asia continued into modern times. See Chiranan 1989 and Hill 1989, 327–28. The Tai polity of Sipsong Panna, now part of southern Yunnan province, paid tribute to both Burma and China until 1885. See *Miandian dang* 01–23, 6–4, Wang Wenshao GX 19/11/17.

[8]Chiranan anticipated by several years others' criticisms that Skinner's macroregions rule out the possibilities for examining frontier trade. See also Millward 1998, 10–11.

migrants, mostly soldiers and their dependents, settled in the Tengyue-Yongchang area during the Ming period (Lee 1982a, 285–90; Huang *et al.* 1985, 91, 109–10). Eventually, civilian settlers followed, and by the late Ming, tens of thousands of Han merchants passed through the Crescent to trade in Tai and Burmese *entrepôts* while others mined silver on the Shunning periphery (Jiang 1983, 332; Pasquet 1989a, 47, 51). Altogether the Han impact was greatest in the northern Crescent, but it was also substantial in the central Crescent. In contrast, the southern Crescent area of Sipsong Panna remained relatively untouched by Ming-era migrations. By the sixteenth century, Han immigrants in all three areas probably comprised far less than one third of the population.[9]

During the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties (*ca.* 1635–62), more Han settled in the Crescent. Many of them followed the Prince of Gui, the last claimant to the Ming throne, as the prince's entourage fled through Tengyue to Burma. Thousands of followers stayed to settle, including demobilized Ming soldiers who drifted toward silver mines in the Gengma area (SNFZ 5:1b-2b; Jiang 1983, 327–32; Pasquet 1989a, 51). Immigration to Yunnan and Guizhou slowed during the early Qing period but then exploded in the eighteenth century. Population pressure in central China and state promotion of migration spurred unprecedented movement towards the empire's southwest. From 1700 to 1850, approximately three million people arrived, and by 1850 Han comprised approximately 60 percent of the Southwest's roughly twenty million people (Lee 1982a, 285, 293–98; Lee 1982b, 720). The effect of Qing migrations to the Crescent is difficult to quantify. From 1625 to 1775, the registered population in Yongchang and Shunning prefectures grew roughly fourfold,[10] but these figures ignore segments of the population and reflect only a portion of the population growth. People living in areas administered by native officials were never registered, and, as a result, there is no accurate estimate of the Crescent population at this time (Lee 1982b, 721, 725).

Despite the lack of accurate figures, descriptive evidence demonstrates the impact of immigration. With the creation of Pu'er Prefecture in 1729, troop quotas in the prefecture and adjacent jurisdictions (which eighteenth-century officials genuinely attempted to meet) increased from one thousand to a high of over thirty-five hundred soldiers (Giersch 1998, 62, 87, 109). Most soldiers brought their families along, in part because the government paid transport costs (GZDYZ 18:20–22, E'ertai YZ 9/4/9; DQGS 893:28a-b). By maintaining frontier garrisons, the Qing state induced thousands of Han to move into the Crescent. Unprecedented numbers of civilian immigrants were also flowing into frontier regions. During the early eighteenth century especially, the Yongzheng Emperor and ministers such as E'ertai enticed pioneers to Yunnan and Guizhou provinces with travel funds, grants of seed or land, and tax breaks (Lee 1982a, 293). E'ertai considered the "interior" (*neidi*) precincts, where Qing officials governed directly, to be appropriate for Han settlers, and he energetically promoted land reclamation near major imperial towns. At the same time, he tried to prevent Han from entering native official jurisdictions and disrupting his

[9]My estimate is based on James Lee's calculation that after the Ming migrations to the Southwest (Yunnan, Guizhou, and southern Sichuan provinces) Han comprised about one third of the entire region's population (Lee 1982a, 285). On the periphery, they probably made up a much smaller fraction.

[10]Yongchang grew from 87,709 registered inhabitants (1625) to 350,300 (1775). Shunning ("Xunning") increased from 15,695 to 68,730 (Lee 1982b, 718, table 2 and 726, table 6). In Yongchang, during the thirty-three years from 1742 to 1775 alone, the registered population doubled from 152,065 to 350,300. See YNTZG 56:18a.

plans to transform these frontier areas into hedges or buffers (*fanli*) inhabited by indigens alone (GZDYZ 8:663–66, E'ertai YZ 5/8/10; QSL 3:564–65). After E'ertai, controlling Han immigration remained a contentious issue, and, paralleling the heated debates and periodic changes of heart regarding Han immigration into Taiwan (Shepherd 1993, 16–19), government policy on Han immigration to Yunnan shifted from time to time. E'ertai's strenuous efforts to bar Han from entering native official areas during the 1720s gave way to more lenient practices in the 1740s when Zhang Yunsui allowed Han miners and merchants to cross freely into frontier zones.[11] By the 1760s, however, opinions in both Beijing and Yunnan had shifted again, and provincial officials once again implemented strict bans against Han on the Yunnan frontier (Pasquet 1989b). The changing policy reflected the frequent tensions between imperial officials and Han immigrants: many officials considered immigrants as threats to frontier stability and therefore argued for strict controls over migration. Qing state and Han settlers were not necessarily natural allies, in part because neither the court nor many bannermen serving in Yunnan ever identified themselves closely with Han migrants.

Regardless of policy, episodic evidence indicates that Han not only settled the "interior" (as E'ertai wished), but that many hearty souls pushed farther afield into the Crescent and locales now part of modern Burma. By 1732 there was a significant Han presence in the interior town of Simao, and by the 1740s over twenty thousand Han lived beyond the interior, at the silver mines near the Tai domains of Gengma and Muang Lem (Menglian) (ZPZZ, 1733–2, Zhang Yunsui QL 11/5/9). The 1770s found immigrant communities throughout the territories beyond Tengyue,[12] and in 1772 Qing officials discovered Han households who had been living in the Hsenwi hills (now in Burma) for some five generations (ZPZZ, 147–6, Zhangbao QL 37/2/21; ZPZZ, 147–8, Zhangbao QL 37/2/1). Overall, most migrants settled near larger towns, such as Pu'er and Simao in the southern Crescent. By the mid-nineteenth century, each town—which had virtually no Han residents before the 1720s—had tens of thousands of Han residents (PEFZ, 7:1b-2b).

Although Han had been living in the Southwest Crescent for centuries, the 1700s proved a watershed era. Adaptable, tough, and perhaps somewhat desperate, pioneers were leaving crowded villages in central China and coming southwest in unprecedented numbers. Whether settling inside imperial walled towns or mingling elsewhere with indigenous people, these migrants helped shape a rapidly changing regional society. One way to measure this change is to examine frontier settlements. Some towns came under direct imperial control so that officials and migrants brought new institutions to these places. Yet indigens also remained crucial to local political and cultural functions as officials, migrants, and locals adjusted to new conditions.

[11]Zhang faced vociferous opposition, which he deflected by explaining that mining was critical to Yunnan's economy and that thousands of Han made their livelihood in frontier mines (ZPZZ, 1733–2, Zhang Yunsui QL 11/5/9; ZPZZ, 1733–3, Guanglu QL 11 [n.d.]; Pasquet 1989a, 57).

[12]In 1771 officials arrested eleven Han merchants in Husa, some of them third-generation residents (ZPZZ, 147–17, Agui *et al.* QL 36/3/20). During 1776–77, the Tengyue district magistrate arrested forty-one single Han men who were living in various native officials' jurisdictions and deported them to Hunan and Jiangxi (GZDQL 41:505–506, Li Shiyao QL 42/12/21). During the late 1770s, Li Shiyao reported the arrests of forty-seven Han from several native official areas: three in Lujiang, three in Mianning, four in Gengma, and thirty-seven along the Tengyue frontier. Although this last undated document was found filed with Neizheng lei memorials in bundle #3 of the Jiaqing 21st year (1816), it was written by Li who served as Yun-Gui Governor General from 1777 to 1780.

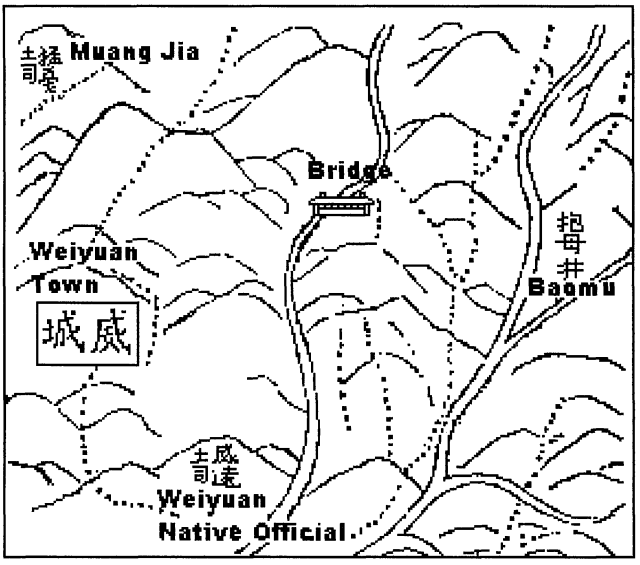

Figure 2. The Weiyuan region (based on the 1839 *Weiyuan tingzhi*, 2:7a). North is to the right of the map.

Shared Space of the Frontier Town

The Weiyuan region is important for understanding frontier political and social change because it demonstrates how frontier governance as well as cultural change included negotiation and accommodation between officials, indigens, and immigrants; in other words, Weiyuan was a "middle ground." Yet, like the Great Lakes region, Weiyuan was not Eden. In 1724 Qing troops invaded Muang Wo (the Tai name for the region) and exiled the Tai ruler to Jiangxi Province, replacing him with an imperial bureaucrat (*gaitu guiliu*). Muang Wo thus became a target of Yongzheng-era frontier activism that brought violence to much of the Southwest. The Qing renamed the area Weiyuan ("projecting imperial might far and wide") and divided Weiyuan's administration among three sites: the salt producing town of Baomu, a town called Muang Jia in Tai (Ch. Mengjia), and the former Tai capital, newly renamed Weiyuan Town (Figure 2).

The physical layout of the towns changed dramatically. The top Qing official, the Weiyuan Vice Prefect for Pacifying the Barbarians (*Weiyuan fuyi tongzhi*), lived in Baomu where, in 1726, a new office was constructed for him. The imperial government also constructed a Salt Receiver's building and a Second Lieutenant's headquarters at Baomu (Figure 3). It built an office for a low-level official called a Registrar (*jingli*) in Muang Jia (Figure 4) and erected three headquarters for imperial army officers in Weiyuan Town (Figure 5) (WYTZ 2:5a-9b; PEFZG 11:5a; YNTZ 18 *xia* 2:42b; YNTZG 39:21a-b). These construction projects changed the physical layout of Weiyuan's major settlements and signaled Weiyuan's new status as imperial territory occupied by Qing officials and soldiers.

From maps produced for the 1839 Weiyuan gazetteer and earlier writings, it is clear that Qing officials endowed all three sites with numerous imperial institutions. Weiyuan Town originally had no perimeter wall, but Qing officials oversaw the

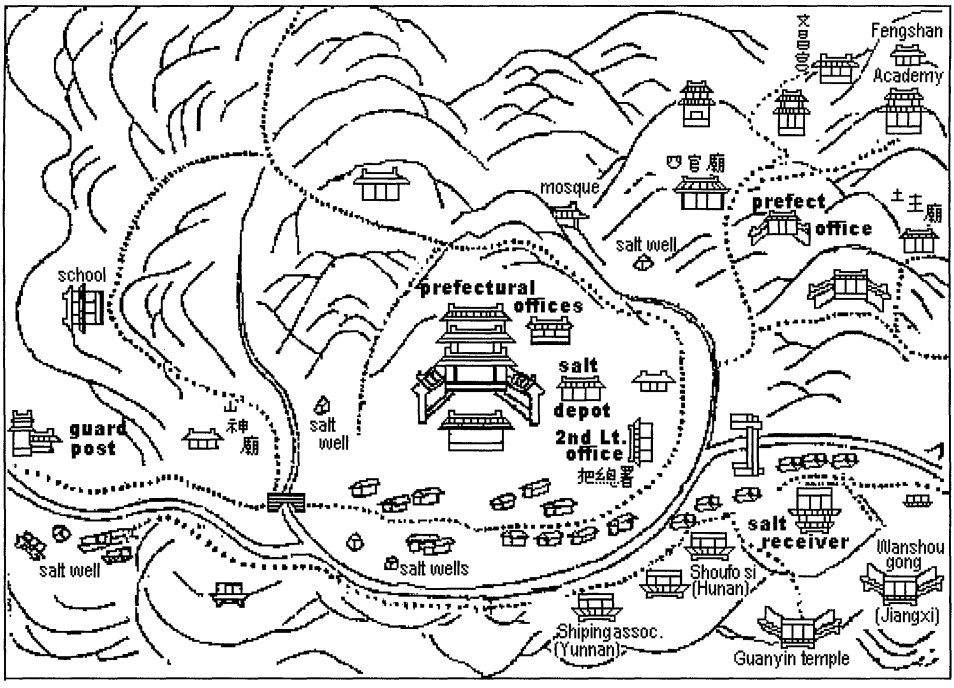

Figure 3. Baomu (based on the 1839 *Weiyuan tingzhi*, 2:4b-5a). North is to the left of the map.

building of this crucial defensive structure in 1745. By the mid-eighteenth century, Weiyuan Town had other important buildings, including a granary and a City God temple (Figure 5).[13] Sacrifices to the City God, who theoretically held Vice-Prefectural rank in the heavenly bureaucracy, reinforced the Qing emperor's claim to unite the rule of heaven and earth (Zito 1996, 72). On the fringes of the empire, such centralizing ideologies were vital, and the Qing established other spaces for important imperial sacrifices, including an Altar of Agriculture in Weiyuan Town and a God of War temple in Muang Jia.

As Weiyuan grew, so too did its Han population (note the "Han village" in Muang Jia). Whereas there had been virtually no Han in Weiyuan before the 1720s, there were over nine thousand registered households by the 1850s (PEFZ 7:2b). This growing civilian population shaped the various towns' physical layouts. In 1775 the Vice Prefect and leading citizens of Baomu established Fengshan Academy outside of town (Figure 3; YNTZG 86:3a). On the west side of Baomu were Han merchant associations (*huiguan*) and temples built by salt traders from Shiping (Yunnan), Hunan, and Jiangxi. Shoufo temples (*Shoufo si*) were cultural centers for Hunanese natives and often served as merchants' associations, while Wanshou temples (*Wanshou gong*) often served the same purpose for Jiangxi natives.[14] Migrants thus brought their home regions' gods and economic institutions to the Yunnan frontier. This was true

[13]For the dates of the wall, see WYTZ 2:16a-b. For the building of the granary, see YNTZG 39:21a-22b. The City God temple existed as early as the 1730s (YNTZ 15:23a-b).

[14]Thanks to Rick Belsky for explaining the regional significance of the temples to me. James Lee also notes these two temples as crucial to Hunan and Jiangxi migrant life (Lee 1982a, 301–02).

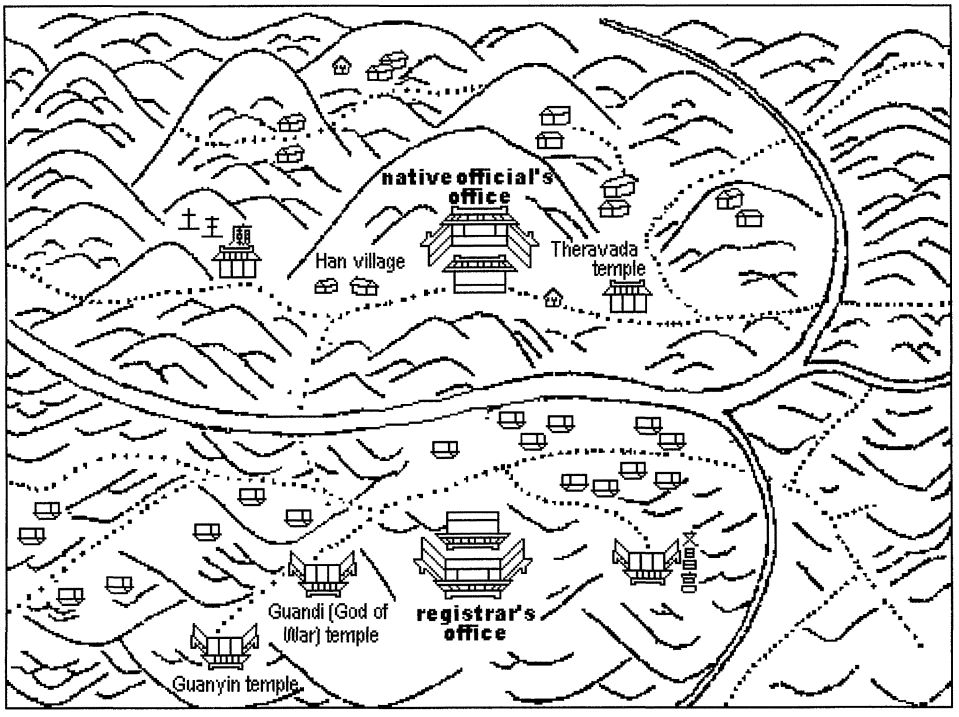

Figure 4. Muang Jia (based on the 1839 *Weiyuan tingzhi*, 2:16b-17a). North is to the right of the map.

of Chinese Muslims (Hui) as well: on Baomu's east side, partially obscured behind the hills, was a mosque (*Qingzhen si*). Baomu flourished as a salt trade center, with both Han merchants and Chinese Muslims (well-known as muleteers) establishing themselves in town.

Despite the intrusion, indigens did not disappear, nor were their cultural and political institutions entirely eclipsed. Building placement demonstrates how imperial and migrant structures shared space with Tai temples and pagodas. Just outside the Weiyuan wall (Figure 5), the imperial Altar of Agriculture stood near two Tai Theravada temples and two pagodas. Not far away were migrant merchant and religious institutions for Shiping, Jiangxi, Ji'an (Jiangxi), and Hunan. Scattered throughout Muang Jia were imperial, Han, and Tai institutions: an imperial God of War temple, a Han neighborhood, and a Theravada temple.

Tai institutions, moreover, were neither relics of cultural persistence nor quaint reminders of the past before imperium and migrants came to dominate the region. Local Tai took an active role in shaping political and social changes. Although the Muang Wo ruling family disappeared in 1724, other aristocratic families remained and continued to administer segments of the diverse local population. Qing officials extended native official titles to a number of local indigenous families, and Weiyuan came to be ruled by a dual bureaucracy, imperial officials presiding over Han settlers, and Tai leaders supervising indigens. Figure 4 illustrates the buildings of Muang Jia's dual bureaucracy: the Qing Registrar's office and the native official's office. It is testimony to the ongoing importance of local Tai officials that the original imperial gazetteer depicts these buildings as equal in size and that the two structures share the

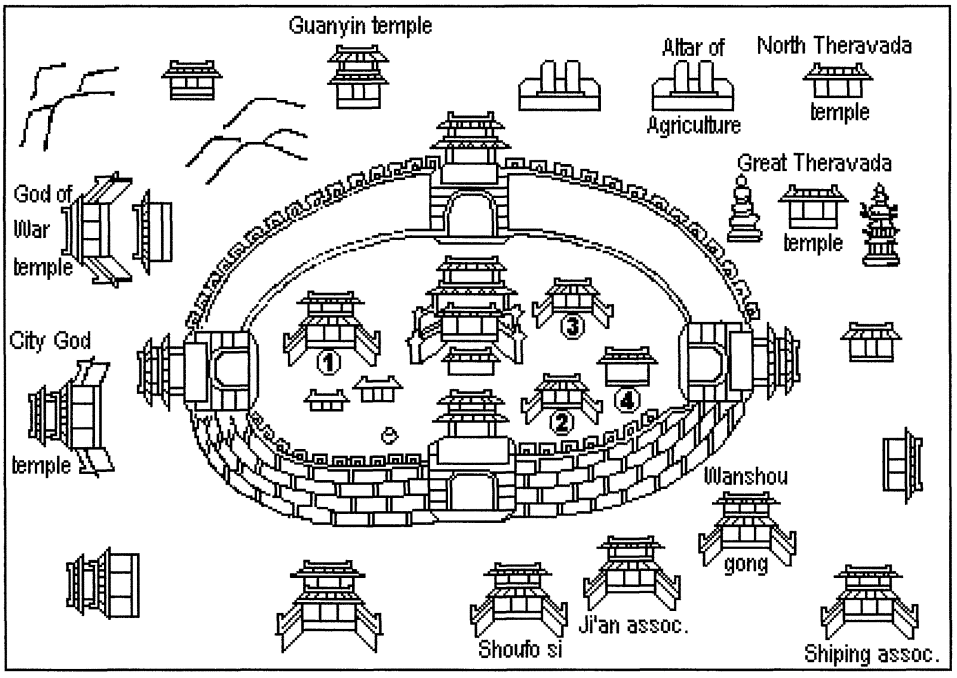

Figure 5. Weiyuan Town (based on the 1839 *Weiyuan tingzhi*, 2:8b-9a). (1) Lieutenant's headquarters; (2) Second Captain's headquarters; (3) Second Lieutenant's headquarters; (4) granary.

map's center (WYTZ 2:16b-17a). Imperial expansion certainly had altered Weiyuan and brought its Tai inhabitants under more intense imperial domination, but this change depended as much upon the area's indigenous past as the imperial present. Indigenous rule and traditions combined with imperial administration, much as the Tai name for Muang Jia was transliterated into the still-used Chinese "Mengjia."

The Muang Jia native official oversaw the Tai and hill peoples; at least that was the way it was supposed to work. This world of political and social change was, however, quite messy. Han migrants did not necessarily settle where they were supposed to, and indigenous rulers sometimes had jurisdiction over migrants who lived within their territories. For example, Dao Wenlong,[15] a Muang Jia native official, received court recognition because he died in service of the empire campaigning against rebellious hill tribes in 1797–98 (WYTZ 5:12–15). Among the militiamen commanded by Wenlong and other local native officials were quite a few with Han surnames, including a Zhang Huguang, his given name referring perhaps to his original home in Hunan (PEFZ 17:17a-22a). Thus, indigenous aristocrats, serving in their modified hereditary positions, commanded Han pioneers. Local and imperial governing institutions were adapted to new situations.

This new state of affairs becomes even more complicated when one further analyzes the conflicts in which Dao Wenlong and Zhang Huguang died. Several of those who fought on the hill tribe side were also Han (GZDJQ 4:93–5, Jianglan JQ 1/11/1). In

[15]Qing officials often assumed "Dao" to be a Tai surname when in fact it was originally the Chinese transliteration of the aristocratic title *cao*, which might be translated as "lord."

effect, Han migrants were living in the communities of both the valley-dwelling Tai and the hill peoples. They might join with one group to oppose the Qing state even as other Han fought under indigens allied to the state, proving that ethnicity and sinicization had little to do with these alliances. The Qing state, moreover, was somewhat concerned about the Weiyuan conflicts but was preoccupied with Miao uprisings elsewhere. As a result, native officials' militias bore the brunt of the fighting. By 1798, only nineteen Qing soldiers had died in action in the Weiyuan region, but 386 militiamen—with Tai, Han, or hill tribe surnames—had been killed. Hindsight suggests that this conflict was less about the imperial project of civilizing the frontier than about local people, under local leaders, trying to protect their communities. The concept of middle ground, reflecting the creation of new solutions in the face of new situations, is one way to account for such change.

In Muang Jia and other Weiyuan towns, Tai inhabitants participated in shaping imperial institutions to meet local requirements while, at the same time, adapting their own institutions. The imperial school system is one example. Southwest China schools were designed to introduce imperial values to indigens and immigrants alike (Rowe 1994). John Herman, however, has convincingly demonstrated that many frontier residents did not consider imperial education an imposition; it could actually be desirable (Herman 1997, 65). This was the case in Weiyuan, where Qing officials, immigrant salt merchants, and "barbarian subjects" (*yimin*) created a network of thirteen charity schools (*yixue*). Local Tai inhabitants, apparently perceiving imperial education to be beneficial, established a charity school in Muang Jia's Theravada Buddhist temple with the imperial Vice-Prefect's help. "Barbarian subjects" in at least eight other Weiyuan locations also founded charity schools. At the same time, Han immigrants took advantage of imperial schooling; one of Baomu's charity schools met in the Shoufo temple, a shrine for Hunan immigrants (YNTZ 7:52b; YNTZG 86:3a-4a; PEFZ 10:9a-10a). The establishment of these charity schools is another example of the middle ground: an imperial institution adapted for local use with the help of locals themselves.

Frontier architecture also reflected the combining of traditions. The Muang Jia native official's office was built in imperial style. When the Weiyuan native official rebuilt his headquarters in 1820, however, he retained many elements of traditional Tai architecture and customs: the building was two stories tall so he could keep livestock on the ground floor in Tai style.[16] Farther south in Muang Lem (Ch. Menglian), the Tai ruler's official compound was rebuilt in 1879 according to Tai customs in order to provide space for the traditional institutions of the Tai government. Some of the compound's features, however, including its upturned eaves (*feiyan*), incorporated Han styles (Dao 1989, 13; Zhao and Wu 1997, 348–49). The region's architecture changed to combine Chinese and local traditions.

Frontier towns, such as those in Weiyuan, provide the clearest example of how middle grounds might develop in common urban space. From nearby buildings, imperial officials and Tai rulers presided over diverse constituencies. Institutions representing these mixed populations clustered around town. Some buildings even served dual purposes, such as the Theravada Buddhist temple and the Hunan Shoufo temple, which housed imperial schools. Qing imperial expansion and Han immigration compelled empire, indigens, and immigrants to coexist; however, coexistence was not determined exclusively by imperial officials or Han immigrants.

[16]WYTZ 2:9b. For a more complete description of traditional Tai houses, see Li 1933, 90.

This becomes evident when we examine the commercial activities that took place both inside and outside of the Crescent's changing towns.

Market and Field

Long-distance trade and land investment demonstrate the Crescent economy's reliance on cross-cultural transactions that were, at times, exploitative. Individual merchants and farmers created a dynamic frontier economy and opened new channels of interaction between immigrant and indigen. Qing officers, meanwhile, sought to curtail or control economic transactions, providing clear evidence of frequent tension between local-level social changes and imperial policy.

Market as Middle Ground

Trading for goods unattainable in Yunnan lured Han merchants to Crescent markets and even farther afield. Many traders trekked all the way to Burma. The opposite was also true: people from outside the Qing realm brought goods from abroad to markets in the Crescent or in Yunnan. These markets attracted people of many backgrounds. Focusing on long-distance trade exposes how merchants relied on personal relations to conduct business from Yunnan to Southeast Asia, linking sections of the region into common trade networks.

Long-distance trade merchandise comprised goods produced in three different areas: (1) in Siam, Burma, and small Tai polities beyond Qing control (referred to conveniently but anachronistically as "Southeast Asia"); (2) in Qing China; and (3) in the Crescent. Southeast Asian imports to Qing China included luxury items such as ivory, uncut gems, jade, gold, and silver, as well as common raw materials and food stuffs, including cotton, iron, sea salt, and salted fish. Major Chinese exports tended to be finished products such as silks, satins, thread, and copperwares. The frontier towns of Tengyue, Yongchang, and Simao were transshipment points for these goods. Merchants brought Southeast Asian products to town to have them taxed and prepared for transport farther into China. Chinese goods entered frontier markets through the same towns (GZDQL 34:124–8, Zhangbao and Li Hu QL 38/12/28; Zhu Mengzhen, 11b-12a; MacLeod 1837, 999–1000; Garnier 1873, 1:401–02).

Just as Southeast Asia supplied products needed by Qing China, so did the Crescent. From at least Ming times, Han merchants regularly went to the southern Crescent for tea and salt and to the northern Crescent for gems, silver, and black jade (Giersch 1998, 69, 77–79). Grain was another important Crescent product. Indigenous farmers sold surpluses to Han traders, who then resold the grain in Yunnan. This inexpensive grain was a particularly important food source for Yunnan's growing population (GZDQL 31:536, Aligun and Mingde QL 33/8/10).

Trade was seasonal, lasting during the dry months. Every fall, after the rains ended in late October, Han transported copperwares and silks south to meet Burmese merchants coming up the great rivers with boats full of merchandise. Most merchants dispersed before the spring rains and rising humidity created malarial conditions in May. Southeast Asians bought Chinese finished goods because Chinese artisans, weavers, and silk manufacturers produced high-quality items. Qing China, and especially Yunnan, however, also needed Southeast Asian products. Raw cotton, for example, was so important to Yunnan that in the 1760s Governor General Yang

Yingju justified his plans to invade the Tai state of Hsenwi in part because it was a producer of cotton.[17] Cotton remained a crucial Yunnan import into the twentieth century. The 1851 Pu'er Prefecture Gazetteer notes that merchants came to Simao with cotton products from Sipsong Panna and beyond (PEFZ 7:7b). Chiranan Prasertkul has used English-language sources to document a vibrant cotton trade at the turn of the twentieth century; Southeast Asian regions produced a great deal of Yunnan's cotton, even during the Muslim uprisings of 1855–73 (Chiranan 1989, 50–53). Chinese sources confirm that both Tengyue and Simao were transshipment points for Southeast Asian cotton until well into the 1900s (TYXTZ 8:n.p.; SMXDZ, 17).

Towns situated on the major trade routes had important markets. Inside the Simao walls, hill people sold tea leaves to Han and Tibetan merchants; cotton was also for sale. Like most market towns, Simao provided services for travelers from afar. Inns and restaurants catered to merchants; stables sheltered the mules and horses, which carried most of the goods (Wu 1782, 1:38, 2:25b-26a; Colquhoun 1883, 2:66–8, 85, 100). Important market towns existed to the north and south of Simao. To the south, in Sipsong Panna's larger towns, Han merchants purchased tea, cotton, metals, and, by the mid-nineteenth century, British textiles (MacLeod 1837, 999–1000; Garnier 1873, 1:401–02). Along the roads leading to nineteenth-century Simao, one encountered Han merchants, hill tribe women, and Tibetan tea merchants (Colquhoun 1883, 2:59–63, 68).

From the northern Crescent, Han ventured far into Tai and Burmese territory, as they had since the Ming dynasty. In fact, so many Han went to the Burmese capital in the eighteenth century (including one Tengyue merchant nicknamed "Deng the Old Burman") that a section of town became known as "Han Street."[18] As in the southern Crescent, both sides of the frontier were linked in a common long-distance trade economy. To sustain this trade, merchants built personal networks across political and cultural boundaries.

In the winter of 1771, for example, Boli, a merchant from Bhamo, set out for the northern Crescent to track down two men who owed his father money.[19] Before the frontier wars of 1765–70, Boli's father had extended credit to Huang Guobin, a Han from Husa, and Bomen, an Achang from Longchuan. Because of the wars, neither Huang nor Bomen had ever returned to Bhamo to pay his debt. With the end of fighting, Boli decided to collect the debts and set off for Husa. He and a hired Tai man brought salt and fish to sell once they crossed the frontier. Leaving Bhamo in February, they followed mountain paths through hill tribe areas where they met and banded together with four Burmese and Siamese merchants. Upon arrival in Husa, they sought out Huang Guobin's family in their small village, and Huang paid 5.5 taels silver (approximately 7.3 ounces) to redeem the debt.

After leaving Huang's village, the merchants again relied on Boli's connections to find shelter. Boli's companions moved to the house of Laocheng, an Achang artisan

[17]Paragraph based on ZPZZ, 112–7, Yang Yingju QL 31/3/29; GZDQL, 32:42–44, Aligun and Mingde QL 33/3/29; GZDQL, 30:531–32, Aligun, Shuchide, E'ning QL 33/5/3; Confession of Ma Bixing, a Longling merchant, in *Mian dang* QL 33 *xia*, 183–85, 191–192; ZPZZ, 142–1, Fuheng *et al.* QL 35/1/19.

[18]Deng Qing'an, a.k.a. "Deng Lao Mian" appears in *Mian dang*, QL 34 *shang*, 199–201. Yuan Kun testified that there was a "Han Street" (*Hanren jie*) in Ava. See *Mian dang*, QL 33 *xia*, 203–05.

[19]Boli's story is preserved in ZPZZ, 147–15, Agui and Zhangbao QL 36/2/6; ZPZZ, 147–16, Agui and Zhangbao QL 36/2/6; Edict of QL 36/2/19, cited in DQGS 879:7–9. The confessions of Boli and the others can be found in JJCLF #013438.

who had met Boli's father during prewar trips to Bhamo. From their base at Laocheng's house, the merchants traded at the Husa market. They sold their goods and bought commodities in demand back home: horses, silk thread, satin, and needles. Boli, meanwhile, had separated from the group in order to travel to Longchuan, where he hoped to collect eight taels silver (10.7 ounces) from the second debtor, Bomen. Instead, he was arrested by Qing imperial soldiers for breaking the postwar ban on transfrontier trade.

The Boli story reveals the methods of frontier merchants. They traveled in groups, especially through the hilly areas west of Muang Mao, where Kachin tribesmen put up road blocks and demanded tolls (YNTZ 24:38a; Leach 1954, 184–95). More importantly, our group arranged their itinerary according to Boli's network of family acquaintances. This network spanned group and region, including both Han (Huang) and indigens (Laocheng, Bomen), and it linked Boli's Bhamo family to residents of Husa and Longchuan. This type of personal trade network was part of the frontier middle ground because people from different backgrounds and places forged and then maintained commercial relations across substantial cultural, spatial, and temporal divides.

While merchants relied on personal contacts to build commercial networks, they were rarely free from political intervention. Qing officials certainly did not imagine the Crescent as a middle ground, nor did they seek to create a region where individuals reconciled diverse cultural and economic traditions. Conservative officials conceived of the frontier as *divided*, not united, into Qing "interior," native official domains, and foreign states. In order to maintain this idealized spatial order, they frequently tried to prevent Han from leaving the interior. Despite a period of more lenient frontier policies that allowed merchants and miners to travel freely during the 1740s and 1750s, the Qing imperial government again tried to impose strict regulations in the 1760s. Then, in the aftermath of wars with Burma (1765–70), the Qing imposed a total trade embargo on goods crossing the frontier. (Evidence about Boli survives because he was arrested during this embargo.[20]) The embargo itself ended, however, when local Qing officials and Tai rulers from Gengma and Bhamo, all of whom had much to gain from regional trade, apparently colluded to trick the Qing and Burmese courts into ending the boycott, proving that cooperation across cultural divides was not limited to petty merchants (Koenig 1990, 18). Nevertheless, Qing officials remained wary of the frontier economy and intervened when they felt security was at stake.

Regulating Land Sales

One area of concern to officials was land ownership. The buying and selling of Crescent agricultural lands started quite early in the Qing dynasty, if not before. In the 1690s, the Ganyai indigenous ruler sold land to a Han merchant from Tengyue, and this was not an isolated incident. During the Qing period, productive farmland in Zhanda attracted so much outside capital that by the twentieth century Han merchant families owned about half of it (Huang *et al.* 1985, 115).

Han investment in indigenous agricultural land was not merely an economic transaction. It was a political issue. The Qing government tried to balance frontier

[20]This embargo seemed to be somewhat successful until 1788. There were, however, quite a few people willing to smuggle goods between Yunnan and Burma. See Giersch 1998, 252–68.

security with cost; ideally, imperial frontiers were secure, yet inexpensive to administer. As Han immigrants settled in peripheral areas, however, their demand for agricultural land often conflicted with indigenous land-use patterns. As a result, tensions frequently escalated into violence, making frontier administration expensive. On Taiwan, the Qing state intervened in land disputes between immigrants and indigens to reconcile conflicting claims. To avoid hostilities, Qing officials even adjusted Chinese legal practice to meet local conditions by enforcing indigenous land rent traditions. Taiwan's hybrid land rent system was both a result of imperial intervention and an example of how middle ground could emerge from the actions of both officials and civilians (Shepherd 1993, chap. 9).

During the 1740s, Qing officials began to worry about Han land purchases in the Crescent. Although they had encouraged settlement in directly administered areas, they did not approve of land purchases in indigenous domains. In 1743 the Yunnan Financial Commissioner reported that in many "barbarian" regions, Jiangxi and Hunan merchants were acquiring agricultural land as payment for usurious interest rates charged to indigens who purchased goods on credit. Fearing the worst, the Commissioner proposed outlawing the sale of goods on credit and forcing merchants to accept payment in silver rather than land. Governor General Zhang Yunsui endorsed this proposal but made it stricter. Not only were merchants forbidden to extend credit to indigens, but they could not accept wives, children, or concubines as payment either (ZPZZ, 1685–4, Zhang Yunsui QL 8/9/21). Clearly, the imperial government believed security interests were often compromised by the economic pursuits of Han immigrants.

Although the imperial government tried to curtail land transfers between indigen and Han, such transfers did not stop. In fact, the frontier wars with Burma (1765–70) increased the transfers. The hardships of war led some Tai aristocrats to mortgage agricultural land, and Tai commoners who worked those fields ended up paying most of their rent to wealthy Han investors. Central government officials found this situation intolerable and called for an investigation into mortgage practices. They ordered Yunnan officials to make sure that once the principal and a reasonable amount of interest were paid on existing loans, the land would revert to indigenous ownership. No new mortgages or sales were to take place (ZPZZ, 142–1, Fuheng *et al.* QL 35/1/19; QSL 3:63–5). Imperial government intervention probably slowed, but definitely did not stop, land sales between indigens and Han. A Qing official who spent the decade 1772–82 (when the criminalization of mortgages and sales was to be implemented) in the Yunnan government wrote that illegal land purchases were still a serious problem. Although this official lapsed into a stereotypical portrait of both indigen naiveté and Han cunning, his description confirms that debt was still the primary problem: "Barbarians have an insatiable desire for liquor and meat . . . Han traitors . . . commonly give them cloth, silk, or other miscellaneous goods on credit, and then offer a feast and invite them to drink and eat. After they are drunk, [the merchants] present the bill" (Wu 1782, 1:42a-43a). The "barbarians" often had no choice but to give paddy land in lieu of payment. If this method did not work, Han swindlers sought equally unscrupulous indigens to help trick landowners into putting their fingerprints on contracts. Thus, even criminals crossed cultural boundaries to plot schemes, and the state was often powerless to eliminate such deals.

Although Han merchants were able to purchase lands from Tai aristocrats and other frontier indigens, the former owners or tenants were not necessarily displaced from the land. Ann Maxwell Hill has found that Han merchants controlled the

lucrative late nineteenth-century Sipsong Panna tea industry, including many tea plantations; as in the eighteenth century, however, Tai and hill people still grew the tea leaves. The entire industry, moreover, relied on intricate relationships. Han merchant families acquired tea plantations by lease or purchase from Tai (and in one case through intermarriage with a Tai aristocratic lineage). They then sublet the plantations to indigenous tenants. Tai headmen and aristocrats usually acted as middlemen between the Han merchants and indigenous tenants (Hill 1989). Middle grounds such as this were the product of changes initiated in the eighteenth century when political and demographic expansion accelerated. Whether exploitative or fair, legal or not, each transaction contributed to a fluid set of precedents and networks governing economy and politics; and migrants, indigens, and officials helped shape these transactions. Participants in the middle ground, moreover, frequently adjusted their cultural norms as well, creating additional friction between empire and society.

Cultural Middle Grounds

Marriage and Identity

By the late eighteenth century, intermarriage and acculturation sometimes blurred the line between migrant and indigen. In some cases, this ambiguity resulted from Han pioneers or their descendants intermarrying and adopting indigenous traditions. One such case involves a man named Gong Liyan. Qing officials who encountered Gong in the 1760s had a hard time categorizing him. They were convinced that Gong descended from followers of the last Ming claimant, the Prince of Gui, who had fled through the Crescent in the 1660s. Qing officials sometimes referred to Gong Liyan and his followers as "Households of Gui" (*Guijia*). Because they believed Gong's family to have immigrated to the Crescent, Qing officials labeled Gong a "Han" (*Hanren*). Yet they were never quite sure of his identity because Gong was a man of the frontier and had immersed himself in its politics. As the head of an important mine in Hsenwi, a Tai domain traditionally beholden to Burma, Gong joined the Hsenwi ruler to challenge, unsuccessfully, the rise of the new Burmese Kon-baung dynasty. Qing officials were well aware of Gong's political role and sometimes referred to him as a "Burmese headman" (*Miandian toumu*) (ZPZZ, 106–1, Wu Dashan QL 27/7/26; DQGS 672:5–6; ZPZZ, 112–7, Yang Yingju QL 31/3/29; ZPZZ, 107–3, Zhangbao QL 38/7/11).

No one knows how Gong Liyan saw himself, but if he was descended from Han immigrants, several pieces of evidence suggest that he had assimilated nicely to frontier culture. First, he had married a Tai woman. Qing documents identify her as Nangzhan, suggesting that she was an aristocrat (the Tai term *nang* or *nan* was a title for noblewomen) (Hudak 1996, 602). Second, the Tai themselves did not consider Gong to be Han, although they were also confused. A Hsenwi chronicle calls him a *saw-bwa* (Burmese for Tai leader), while a Muang Lem chronicle identifies him as Burmese.[21] Variously called Han, Tai, or Burmese, Gong Liyan's history testifies to the fluidity of frontier identities. After Gong's death, his followers eventually fled into Qing territory, where the imperial government found land for them to settle. At

[21]Hsenwi chronicle excerpted in Scott 1900, 249–51. See also MLXFS, 14.

this time, the Qing officials, who were aware of these refugees' connection to Gong, labeled them "barbarian subjects" (*yimin*), the same word used for the people of the native officials (ZPZZ, 107–3, Zhangbao QL 38/7/11). From "households of Gui" to Burmese to Qing barbarian subjects, identities along the frontier shifted according to time, place, and point of view.

An important component of this fluidity was intermarriage. Many Han living in the northern Crescent were married to Tai (ZPZZ, 142–1, Fuheng *et al.* QL 35/1/19). Usually it was a Han man who married an indigenous woman, but the effects of their union on relatives varied. In some cases, such as Gong Liyan's, intermarriage signaled increasing assimilation of the groom to the bride's community as ties to his Han past dissolved. For Shi Shangxian, introduced above, intermarriage also meant severing ties with his past. He left his wife and adoptive family, never to return, and died supporting his father-in-law's side against the Qing state. For this, he was portrayed as an ethnic traitor (*Hanjian*). In other cases, marriage united two families and two ways of life. Zhang Wenlian was a Han from the Husa area, but his mother was an indigen, perhaps Achang. Records of Zhang exist because he and his maternal uncle were captured by Burmese troops during the 1760s. Zhang later escaped and reported the incident to Qing officials. His testimony and a later independent Qing report both identified his uncle as a "barbarian subject" (*Mian dang* QL 33 *xia*, 187–190; *Mian dang* QL 34 *shang*, 199–201). Although Zhang Wenlian was the offspring of a mixed marriage and was identified with his father's Han heritage, he maintained close relationships with his maternal relatives.

Intermarriage was frequent enough to be outlawed by the imperial state. Officials opposed it for fear of losing control of both sides, Han and indigen. This fear of blurring identities dates back to the seventeenth century when imperial officers first discovered Han immigrants to the Southwest adopting indigenous funeral and marriage practices (Herman 1997, 56). Concern increased when the Qing court outlawed intermarriage in the 1720s and renewed efforts to prevent intermarriage in the 1770s (ZPZZ, 142–1, Fuheng *et al.* QL 35/1/19).

Although Qing officials preferred to segregate immigrants from indigens (except in areas such as Weiyuan, where Qing officials were close by), they promoted imperial values among both groups. One basic imperial value was overt demonstration of loyalty to the dynasty by wearing the notorious queue. As late as 1758, many "barbarians" in Yunnan did not wear the queue (ZPZZ, 894–1, Wu Shaoshi QL 23/11/7). The issue became particularly important during the 1760s when Governor General Yang Yingju tried to force the queue on all Crescent leaders and militias in order to distinguish Tai allies from the "wild barbarians from outside the realm" (ZPZZ, 881–1 and 881–3, Yang Yingju QL 31/3/22 and QL 31/4/11). Many Tai began wearing the queue eventually, but they integrated it into their own styles of dress. When Archibald Colquhoun traveled through the northern Crescent in the 1880s, he found many local Tai men wearing queues. Yet Colquhoun had no difficulty identifying them because they "wore blue turbans with the pig-tail wound into its coils, while the Chinese [wore] the regulation 'skull-cap' " (Colquhoun 1883, 2:328–29). The turban, or kerchief wrapped around the head, had distinguished northern Crescent Tai men from at least the eighteenth century.[22] Forcing frontier inhabitants to accept the queue did not create uniformity, because locals continued to find ways to distinguish themselves when they desired.

[22]Boli admitted to wearing a kerchief in order to pass as a local Husa Tai (JJCLF #013438).

Rather than converging towards uniformity, Crescent cultures mixed and diverged in complicated ways. Indigenous elites, for example, often adopted imperial customs. During his visit to Chiang Hung in 1837, T. E. MacLeod found Tai aristocratic men wearing Chinese-style clothing. He wrote: "I dined the next day at the palace and met all the Tsaubuas (*saw-bwas*) and chiefs, who like the day before were clad in Chinese costumes. All the attendants were in the same dress, and the dinner etc. completely Chinese. A few cups of spirits, which some of them freely drank, soon made them throw off the formality of Chinese etiquette, and strive to make themselves agreeable . . . " (MacLeod 1837, 997). Then, too, many Han farmers abandoned some Chinese customs and adopted Tai ways. One twentieth-century observer of frontier society wrote that "Chinese appear to have great powers of assimilation but in the case of areas where Han and Tai live together, the result is often that Han acculturate to Tai and not vice versa" (Chen 1941, 16–17). As hard as the Qing government tried to orchestrate frontier society and economy, it could not control which customs people adopted or abandoned. This becomes particularly clear in examining education and language.

Speaking Chinese

Qing officials believed imperial education to be a cornerstone in civilizing the frontier. Under the leadership of Chen Hongmou, the state was particularly active during the 1730s in establishing schools to promote imperial education in remote areas. The goal was universal education for boys, who would first learn Mandarin Chinese (*guanyu*) and then read carefully selected texts that conveyed Neo-Confucian morals and Chinese patriarchal values (Rowe 1994, 429–32, 439–43). Evidence suggests that these Qing education polices were sometimes successful. Imperial sources periodically extolled the assimilation of indigens as a result of their sons attending school and learning proper imperial customs, and MacLeod found Tai in Chiang Hung who spoke Chinese (ZPZZ, 895–1, Liu Zao QL 25/4/22; WYTZ 3:28). The Weiyuan schools, mentioned above, also seem to have been successful.

Despite these successes, the impact of imposing Mandarin Chinese and imperial elite values on frontier inhabitants should not be overestimated. The same Tai aristocrats who could converse in Chinese also learned to read and write their own Tai dialect, the language used to preserve local history and religion. As youths, Tai elites learned to chant scripture, read, and write during stints as novices in Theravada Buddhist temples (Carey 1900, 508). The aristocrats MacLeod met apparently balanced both imperial and indigenous customs in their lives. Ordinary Sipsong Panna Tai, however, lost the chance for an imperial education when the three Sipsong Panna charity schools, originally opened by Tai aristocrats in 1735, were closed sometime before 1787 (YNTZ 1736, 7:54a; YNTZG 1835, 86:2a-b).

Later observers, moreover, did not consider the Crescent to be a place where imperial values had penetrated deeply. In a 1909 memorial, Shen Bingkun proposed schooling for Yunnan indigens; apparently Chen Hongmou's eighteenth-century schools had not yet transformed the frontier. And transformation was precisely the point for both Chen and later for Shen, who wrote, "The spirit of unity must have its origin in transformation through imperial culture (*tonghua*)" (ZPZZ, 895–2, Shen Bingkun XT 1/4/11). But Shen found little unity in Yunnan, because, he argued, the frontier was isolated from the interior by differences in language and culture. Earlier

efforts at imperial education apparently had not been as far-reaching as many officials had hoped.

Shen, however, overlooked significant cultural changes that had begun before Qing rule and accelerated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chinese did become an important frontier language during this time, but most did not learn Mandarin Chinese from gentlemen teachers (who simultaneously dispensed large doses of imperial ideology). Instead, they learned the Yunnanese dialect that many people spoke in the markets (Garnier 1873, 1:402). Even a "wild savage," as a Qing soldier described one frontier denizen, might speak some Chinese. This particular man had learned Chinese during trips to Crescent markets, and his son and mother also spoke Chinese. Hill women such as his mother, it turns out, often went to market to sell forest products and picked up the necessary lingo in the process.[23]

Conversely, Han also learned indigenous languages. Conversation, after all, is a two-sided affair. Immigrants to Talang used the local indigenous language in the marketplace (PEFZG 8:2). In addition, the state found bilingual people useful. A Han man from Zhanda, for example, served as an interpreter for a Qing officer during the Burma Campaigns (JJCLF #013439), and in legal cases tried before Qing courts, imperial officials sought (and found) both indigens who could speak Chinese and Han who understood indigenous tongues (ZPZZ, 1747–1, Jianglan QL 60/9/28). As one might expect, frontier people shifted from one language to another, depending on the circumstances. Multilingual individuals were not only able to communicate across ethnic divides; they were also more mobile than monolingual people. During 1766–67, a twenty–eight–year–old Han soldier was held captive in Burma. Neither shackled nor imprisoned, he spoke no local languages and could not ask directions to escape. One day he encountered two Tai travelers, one of whom "saw that I was from the interior and came over to speak to me. Because he understood Chinese, I asked him where he was from and what his name was . . . I [also] asked him if he knew the way to [the edge of Qing territory]."[24] This particular Tai and his companion were from a town west of Tengyue and knew the frontier geography quite well. The soldier pleaded with them to return for him after the summer wet season. In the meantime, the two Tai went to Rangoon to worship. In the fall, after an anxious summer spent waiting and thinking of home, the soldier suddenly saw the two Tai again. All three slipped through the mountains back to Qing territory where the soldier paid his guides in silver for their effort. Then the two Tai, who had cavalierly (or so it seems) wandered from Qing to Burmese territory and back again, departed for home.

Conclusion

Were these Tai who spoke Chinese yet worshipped at Rangoon's Theravada Buddhist temples exceptional or significant? This question is related to a larger one: how did indigens—as well as immigrants and imperial officials—contribute to changes on the early modern Yunnan frontier? One method for addressing these questions is to conceive of the frontier as "middle ground," the destructively creative

[23]Confession of Wu Dagui in JJCLF #013366. For examples of hill women in the markets, see Colquhoun 1883, 2:333; Carey 1900, 509–11.

[24]Confession of Wang Guolin, in JJCLF #13040.

formulation of "something new" in lands where alien cultural and political institutions meet. The concept of middle ground allows us to analyze imperialism (in this case the consolidation of the Qing southwestern frontier) and colonization (the migration and settlement of Han) without ignoring the agency of indigens. Previous scholarship explains the transformation of the early modern southwestern frontier into a region more integrated into the empire but does not account for local idiosyncrasies: the crucial indigenous aristocracies onto whom the empire mapped its hierarchy of native officials, the prevalence of cross-cultural ties knitting together regional economy, and the complex exchanges of language and custom. Like our two Tai travelers, the region's communities were adaptable, and so must our analysis be. In moving away from bipolar ideas about assimilation and persistence, the middle ground offers a hand up for Qing historians trying to climb out of the sinicization quagmire.

Despite violent suppression, neither imperial state nor migrants entirely displaced local frontier communities. Instead, as in the towns of Weiyuan, Qing officials found themselves forced to administer diverse populations, and so they developed new methods of rule, combining imperial and indigenous institutions. Local people, whether indigen or immigrant, took part in shaping the use of imperial institutions, including the schools that were welcomed into Muang Jia's Theravada temple and Weiyuan's Hunan migrant temple. Meanwhile, local institutions—most notably Theravada temples and Tai officials' offices—continued to function even as imperial structures and immigrant businesses grew up around them. The Qing state had conquered Weiyuan and Han migrants dominated the salt trade out of Baomu, but together they did not "swamp" indigenous society.

In fact, the Qing state often perceived Han transfrontiersmen as threats to stability. Officials outlawed usury and land sales, hoping to keep Tai elites from becoming alienated from both property and Qing regime. The state passed laws against intermarriage between Han and Tai, hoping to prevent conflict over sex and property. Despite these efforts to regulate, however, the Qing state was ultimately limited in power. Cases of intermarriage were frequent enough to elicit comment and legislation, and the fear of Han who "went native" were sometimes realized, as in the case of Shi Shangxian. The regional economy, moreover, relied on people crossing political and social boundaries to bring raw materials into China and to export finished goods. The frequency of this interaction was expressed in the market where people of all backgrounds came together, communicating in Yunnanese or native tongues but recognizing the language of commodity exchange.

Thus, in order to understand frontier social change, we must look beyond the Qing state. As a nineteenth-century European observer noted, one Tai town on market day had so many diverse people that it "was crowded with a motley throng . . . all meeting together" (McCarthy 1879, 505). Qing officials shared this disdain for mixing—not out of racist ideology but out of concern for control. Yet, try as they might, imperial officers could not prevent the Crescent from becoming a frontier where immigrant and indigen traded, cheated, and cooperated with each other outside official channels. Perhaps an 1804 report to the throne best summarizes this dynamic:

> Of every prefecture, district, and county in Yunnan, many are places where barbarians and subjects live all jumbled together . . . . There are subjects (*minren*) who have gone to barbarian areas to plow and plant. There are also barbarians who are very similar to Han people and come to the interior to trade and live. Over the years, the former and the latter marry; their clothing and headwear becomes confused, and they learn

> each other's languages. In a little while, it becomes impossible to distinguish the barbarian from the Han. Among these people, there are *Hanjian* [who threaten stability].
>
> (ZPZZ 1754–5, Yongbao and Wudajing, JQ8/6/4)

Middle ground provides an analytical tool to conceptualize these social changes on the early modern southwestern frontier, and it may prove helpful on other frontiers, too. Through this concept, local and imperial history both matter, and historical agency is restored to the "motley throng" who lived and worked at the crossroads of China and Southeast Asia.

Glossary

Achang 阿昌
Baomu 抱母
benren 本人
Boli 波岁
Bomen 波悶
Bulang 布朗
Cao Xiu 曹秀
Dai 傣
Dao Wenlong 刀文龍
Deng Lao Mian 鄧老緬
E'ertai 鄂爾泰
fanli 藩籬 or 籓籬
feiyan 飛檐
Ganyai 干崖
gaituguiliu 改土歸流
Gengma 耿馬
Gong Liyan 宮裡雁
guanyu 官語
Guijia 鬼家 or 桂家
Han 漢
Hanjian 漢奸
Hanren 漢人
Hanrenjie 漢人街
Huang Guobin 黃國賓
Hui 回
huiguan 會館
Husa 戶撒
Ji'an 吉安
jingli 經歷
Laocheng 老乘
Longchuan 隴川
Mengjia 猛戛
Menglian 孟連
Miandian toumu 緬甸頭目
minren 民人
Munai (mine) 募迺
Nangzhan 攮占
neidi 內地
Pu'er 普洱
Qianlong 乾隆
Qingzhen si 清眞寺
Shi Shangxian 施尙賢
Shiping 石屏
Shoufo si 壽佛寺
Shunning 順寧
Simao 思茅
Talang 他郎
Tengyue 騰越
tonghua 同化
tusi 土司
Wanshou gong 萬壽宮
Weiyuan 威遠
Weiyuan fuyi tongzhi 威遠撫夷同知
Xishuangbanna 西雙版納
Yibang 倚邦
Yang Yingju 楊應琚
yimin 夷民
yixue 義學
Yongchang 永昌
Yongzheng 雍正
Zhanda 盞達
Zhang Huguang 張湖廣
Zhang Wenlian 張文連
Zhang Yunsui 張允隨

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