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Beyond Borders: Stories of Yunnanese Chinese Migrants of Burma. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 2014.

Starting in the fifteenth century, along what is now the Burma-Thailand-Yunnan borders, massive amounts of silver flowed into northern mainland Southeast Asia to buy gems to be sent as tribute to the Chinese royal court.¹ This trade, as it grew, played an important role in shaping regional polities into the city-states of Southeast Asia. It is amazing that, even after five hundred years, we can still hear stories from the formative early eras in *Beyond Borders*. This ethnographic and theoretically engaging study explores the stories of Yunnanese Chinese migrants to the Yunnan-Burma border area from the Cold War to the era of globalization. The study draws on ten years of fieldwork by the author, Chang Wenchin, who moved between villages along the border and lived among diaspora populations in northern Burma, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou. Over the course of her fieldwork, Chang interviewed a number of Yunnanese Chinese informants and in this book she brings their stories to the reader. Chang reveals how Yunnanese Chinese migrants use social agency to set up and expand their networks, negotiating both illegal trade and their ambiguous political status. With a nod to James Scott's attempt to theorize a new concept in area studies with the example of Zomia, Chang turns upland people's fragmented stories into vivid family histories, providing a window into their social structure and kinship and the social relationships that have stretched across borders and are shared across the diaspora.

The book covers two main topics: migration history and trading. In Chang's exploration of both she focuses on social mobility and the circulation of merchandise, first separately and then in relation to how the two subjects are interwoven. The book's first part introduces the reader to the migratory experiences of five narrators, in which the frames of kinship, gender, and ethnic difference subtly emerge from stories told from diverse angles. Family history is always the main topic for the migrants, but their stories reveal their personal drive to get beyond their family's boundaries and the difficulty of dealing with homesickness once they'd succeeded. The book begins with Zhang Dage's family history, how his parents joined the KMT guerrillas in 1950 and left Thailand to follow the continuous flow of migrants to Taiwan. Chapter 2 turns to the daughter of a migrant family, A Maew, who returned home to Myanmar after

1 See Sun Laichen, "Shan Gems, Chinese Silver and the Rise of Shan Principalities in Northern Burma, c. 1450-1527," *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor*, ed. Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013[2010]), 169-196.

studying in Taiwan to find her family situation in chaos: her mother had left, her brother had a drug problem, and violence had become a part of their life. In chapter 3 Mr. Li and his sons tell stories about pursuing their ambitions, and Ma Yaya, a Yunnanese Muslim, tells of making a living through transnational religious networks in chapter 4. All these narratives show how the subjectivities of each individual intertwine with historically contingent circumstances, infusing their experiences with a range of sentiments — from hope and pain, desire and loss, to ambition, alienation, anxiety, and ambivalence. These emotions are tied to complications involving their families, ethnic others, states, and societies.

Working from these memories of personal experience and family narratives, Chang pieces together a hidden history of how each survived in the gaps and shadows between the Kachin and Shan militaries, the Burmese government, and local upland ethnic Wa people, all the while running illegal trading networks. Clearly, as Chang illustrates, being marginal is not equivalent to being passive. While elder male figures like Zhang Dage, Mr Li, and Ma Yaya all fulfill the role of able leaders, they also represent the loss of paternal authority, as the next generation is eager to leave, take risks, and work illegally in hopes of obtaining social status in Taiwan. Available alternatives include a life of drug addiction, jail time, and the stress of forever floating in insecure environments.

In contrast, the Yunnanese Muslims construct their own social and trade networks while coping with their marginality in the Islamic networking system beyond Burma. Commonly experienced encounters across differences strengthen both their feeling of displacement and their Muslim ethnic identity. Through the stories of female migrants, Chang explores in depth the sentiments of suffering, since Muslim women find themselves doubly marginalized, separated from their families yet expected to adhere to a strict Muslim code, particularly with regard to marriage.

Aside from focusing on family, Chang explores the long history of trading networks connected by the circulation of merchandise among people of this area. The second part of the book describes the economic activities of each group from the 1950s through to the 1990s. Chapter 5 discusses the cross-border caravan trade undertaken by Yunnanese men between Yunnan and Thailand during the era of the Burmese socialist regime. Chapter 6 focuses on the Yunnanese woman Qiu Dajie, illuminating the social construction of gender inequalities in both the public and domestic spheres. The author highlights the ongoing process of shaping and reshaping “gendered geographies of power” as Qiu’s narratives reflect the mercantile keenness, frustration, and pain of Chinese women who work in these trading circles. Chapter 7 explores the transnational jade trade through a case study of the Duan and Peng families.

No matter how fragmented, unpredictable, or inconsistent the power structures in the area are, the Yunnanese find ways to negotiate with local people, ethnic forces, and various political entities to continue their trade in opium, jade, textiles, and other necessities and maintain their economic security.

The stories highlight how, under the changing economic policies of the Chinese and Burmese governments, mobility is not reserved for the privileged but is prevalent as well among ordinary Yunnanese possessing a variety of types of expertise, including language abilities, knowledge of jade, and other technical skills, in addition to a willingness to take risks. What constitutes a “border” differs widely across situations. For example, in addition to the social lines of status and class, the book’s protagonists cross borders in relation to gender, body, and geography, providing ample proof of their resilience.

As we see the boundaries of family and community reveal their weaknesses, by her descriptions of how migrants deal with different political entities Chang draws our attention to the fact that exchange relations can take many forms in addition to reciprocity, including taxation, robbery, and bribery. In the internationally popular realm of cross-border subjectivities, this book draws attention to a critical yet often overlooked viewpoint: It challenges readers to reconsider attitudes and understandings about illicit activity, and particularly about the system of illegal trade as defined by nationality. Chang does this by revealing the experiences of Yunnanese Chinese migrants through personal stories that describe their search for a better life beyond borders.

Even so, the book is not without gaps or room for improvement. While providing human insight into Yunnanese stories, Chang overlooks the historical diversity of “migrants” in this area; in addition to the Muslim and Han Chinese portrayed in the book, the Wa, Lahu, Kachin, and Lisu are also peoples who have been the active across the Yunnan-Burma border for hundreds of years, keeping the fluid concept of “Upland Yunnanese” and “Yunnanese Chinese” open to further discussion. For example, has the shared diaspora experience helped shape a common “Yunnanese” identity, or is the sense of identity more like that of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia from Guangdong and Fujian who identify as “Chinese” in preference to any location-based identity? The Muslim Ma Yeye is the fourth generation of his family in Burma. The family of the Burmese People’s Volunteer Force leader, Mr Li, has been living in Kokang since the seventeenth century; his father was once a native chieftain under the Qing dynasty. Moreover, Peng and Duan’s networks in Burma and Thailand might not have begun only in 1951. Against a background of long-term migration, their family and personal experiences are imbedded in different historical contexts that result in different local networks and ethnic identities in the present.

A second question Chang does not address is why, given the wide Yunnanese Muslim social network defined by religion and based in mosques, have the common beliefs shared by Yunnanese “Chinese” not likewise produced local temples as an organizing feature among Yunnanese migrants? Still, despite the questions left unanswered, this book is a deeply moving read, as Chang leads us through the movements, struggles, and experiences of Yunnanese migrants across Southeast Asia. It also constitutes a worthy contribution to borderland studies in both its ethnographic detail and its theoretical engagement.

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