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# Spectral Jade

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# Spectral Jade

## Materiality, Conceptualisation, and Value in the Myanmar-China Jadeite Trade

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Spectral Jade

# Spectral Jade

## Materiality, Conceptualisation, and Value in the Myanmar-China Jadeite Trade

Henrik Kloppenborg Møller

LUND
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Spectral Jade: Materiality, Conceptualisation, and Value in the Myanmar-China Jadeite Trade

**Abstract**

Hosting a cultural history of 8.000 years in China, jade has seen a revival in China's current era. Jadeite is the most expensive type of jade, and the vast majority of jadeite is mined in Myanmar's Kachin State and sold in China.

*Spectral Jade* is a study of trade, carving, and use of jadeite. The dissertation is based on ethnographic research in different nodes of the jadeite commodity chain, including 12 months of fieldwork in Ruili, a hub for jadeite trade on China's border with Myanmar. Using jadeite as a lens for examining China's economy, society, and cosmology, and its impact in Myanmar, the dissertation explores eight themes in eight chapters: Domain, Configuration, Opacity, Visibility, Congruity, Fissure, Order, and Potential. The chapters explore how interplays between materiality and conceptuality create value in the jadeite industry.

The dissertation first discusses how jadeite markets are structured by ethnic armed conflict, policies, economic growth, infrastructure, networks, relationships, capital, technologies, and by the materiality of jadeite itself. Jadeite prices boomed from 2008, but markets for high-, and mid-grade jadeite saw a recession from 2014 due to an anti-corruption campaign and declining economic growth in China. This shifted demand towards cheaper jadeite types and amber, which now see booming markets facilitated by online trade. The dissertation employs an institutional analysis to account for these short-term fluctuations in the jadeite market. But Chinese consumer demand for jade is also underpinnned by a cosmology that changes at a slower pace than policies and economic growth.

Secondly, the dissertation discusses Chinese cosmological assumptions that posit jade as an animated agent, which interacts with humans across a range of registers. Some argue that China has become to too full and material at the expense of an emptiness and spirituality valued in Taoist and Buddhist thought, and describe jade as a spiritual anchor in a rapidly changing society and economy. Exploring relations between jade and humans in different contexts, the dissertation points to a holistic Chinese cosmology that orders the world through analogies and iterations (similarities) and posits oppositions (differences) as mutually constitutive, rather than mutually exclusive.

Theoretically, the dissertation adds a post-anthropocentric perspective to Lévi-Strauss' argument that nonhumans are 'good to think'. In line with new materialist and ontological approaches, the dissertation makes a case for a closer scrutiny of how particular properties of nonhumans - in this case jadeite - afford perspectives for people engaging with them, including ethnographers.

**Key words** Jade, China, Yunnan, Myanmar, Kachin, borderland, ethnicity, trade, craft, markets, guanxi, masculinity, materiality, ontology, conceptual, nonhuman, holism, analogism, Taoism, nationalism, authenticity, spirituality, value, morality, ethnography, narratives

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# Spectral Jade

## Materiality, Conceptualisation, and Value in the Myanmar-China Jadeite Trade

Henrik Kloppenborg Møller

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**People and Jade Stones.** Painting by Hkawn San, a 16-year old ethnic Kachin girl, who has lived in an IDP camp in Myanmar's Kachin State for the past eight years. Hkawn San was displaced from her village due to a military conflict between the armed forces of Myanmar (Tatmadaw) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which re-erupted in 2011 when a ceasefire from 1994 broke down. The jadeite mines are located in the Kachin State, and the armed conflict is related to control over the mines. The KIA still controls some mines, but the Tatmadaw has taken control over many mines, and mining concessions are leased out to military cronies and private investors. The vast majority of jadeite is sold to China, where jade is an object of both economic and spiritual value. The jadeite mines see deadly landslides and ecological devastation, and heroin use and HIV is rife in the mining areas.

# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ..... **11**

**Introduction: From the Philosopher's Stone to Blood Jade** ..... **15**

The Philosopher's Stone ..... 18

Business and Belief ..... 22

Blood Jade and the Jade Disease ..... 25

Outline of the Dissertation ..... 31

**1. Materiality: Theoretical Approach** ..... **37**

Focus of the Dissertation ..... 40

Spectrum and Spectre ..... 43

Jade in China ..... 44

Jade Beyond China ..... 49

Materialism and Idealism ..... 52

New Materialism and The Ontological Turn ..... 54

Jade as Heuristic: A Non-Linguistic Approach ..... 58

Change and Continuity ..... 72

**2. Configuration: Methodological Considerations** ..... **77**

Following Ruili's Jade Markets ..... 79

Code-Switching, Politeness, and Reciprocity ..... 87

Interviews and Personhood ..... 92

Ethics and Relationships ..... 94

Ethnographic Representation ..... 111

**3. Opacity: The Myanmar-China Jade Trade** ..... **115**

A History of the Myanmar-China Jade Trade ..... 117

The Jade Trade Today: Emporiums, Taxation, and Transport ..... 121

Jade, Drugs, HIV, and Ethnic Minorities ..... 126

The 'Fake Amber Machine': Gem Trade in the Kachin State ..... 134

Manual Labour and Big Business in Mandalay .....143
Knowledge and Ignorance: Jade Users in Shanghai .....146
The Productivity of Opacity .....153

**4. Visibility: Jade Trade and Carving in Ruili .....155**
Ruili in Context .....156
Organisation and Stratification in Ruili's Jade Markets .....162
The Bazaar .....165
Big Companies and New Market Towns .....168
Exhibition Environments .....172
Online Trade: An Elephant Cannot Fight the Ants .....174
Jade Carving: Art, Craft, and Computer Drawing .....177
Opacity, Visibility, and Recursivity of Value .....181

**5. Congruity: Materiality and Social Relationships .....187**
Culturalist and Institutionalist Approaches to Guanxi .....189
Jade and Guanxi .....191
Riding a Guanxi Network .....196
Making 'Brothers' at the KTV .....203
Cigarettes, Alcohol, and Tea .....208
Guanxi and Friendship: Exteriority and Interiority .....218
Forms of Sociality .....222

**6. Fissure: Interethnic and Intraethnic Conflicts .....225**
A Rohingya Jade Trader in Ruili .....226
Ethnic Identity and Conflicts .....230
Borders and Mobility .....235
Interethnic Alliances .....238
Ethnicity and Human-Nonhuman Relations in Cockfighting .....241
"They are Burmese Dogs!" Conceptualizing an Interethnic Conflict .....246
"Allah will punish him!" Reconsidering an Intraethnic Conflict .....248
Narrative Ambiguities and Intraethnic Positioning .....250

**7. Order: Jade Nomenclature, Analogies, and Valuation .....253**
Sieves: Distinguishing and Constituting Matter .....256
Vagueness versus Pigeon-Holing of Terms .....260
Valuation Parameters and Vernacular Nomenclature for Feicui .....266

Jade-Women Analogies....278
Nature-Culture, Analogies, and Prototypes....280

**8. Potential: Indeterminacy and Determination....285**
Indeterminacy, Knowledge, and Flexibility....287
Surface and Substance....289
Hammer and Spectroscopy....293
Immutable Jade and Ephemeral Humans....297
Predestined Encounters, Luck, and Karmic Transmission....301
Social-Material Analogies....305
Domains and Determination....309
Oppositions and Transgressions....312
Distance and Intimacy....314

**Conclusion: Opening Up....317**

**Epilogue: A More Ethical Jade Industry or More of the Same?....321**

**Appendixes....325**
Conceptual and Material Oppositions....325
Key Chinese Terms....326
Chinese Jade and Gemstone Nomenclature....330

**Bibliography....335**

**Online Sources....355**

# Acknowledgements

A Chinese jade carver in Ruili once suggested I have *yuanfen* with jade. Yuanfen can characterise a predestined relationship. While my Danish rationality might have objected that human will had brought me to Ruili to study jade, yuanfen had an explanatory force in China. The carver said that when carving jadeite jade – the object of this study – you must follow the material itself, rather than forcing your preconceived ideas and ambitions upon it. His advice seems equally relevant for the craft of carving out a dissertation from ethnographic material. People, things, and concepts we encounter can challenge and enrich our assumptions, and this dissertation concludes a journey that has allowed me to rethink some of my assumptions about what is valid, interesting, important, and beautiful. I am grateful to a number of people, who have contributed in this process.

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Ruili is located in the Dehong Prefecture of China's Yunnan Province, just by the border with Myanmar

Most feicui mines are located around Hpakant in Myanmar's Kachin State, 237 kilometres from Ruili as the crow flies

# Introduction: From the Philosopher's Stone to Blood Jade

In October 2016, a giant stone believed to contain precious jade was uncovered in the Kachin State of northern Myanmar. Information about the stone was sparce, but some news sources reported its size to be 4.3 times 5.8 metres, its weight to be around 174 tonnes, and its estimated value to be up to US$ 170 million.[1] The brief news reports on this jade stone raised a number of questions: How can a stone be worth up to US$ 170 million? How is its value established? Who owns the stone, and how are profits from it distributed? Is it taxed, by whom, and how much? How is the stone traded? How will it be transformed into jade jewellery? Who will buy this jewellery and why? For now, these questions remain, and their answers may never be made public. But examining trajectories of other jade stones may aid in illuminating how the jadeite trade between Myanmar and China is structured, practiced, and experienced by participants. That is the aim of this dissertation

I first encountered jade in Shanghai in 2005. At that time, I did fieldwork among young Chinese vendors of counterfeit Western fashion and electronic goods, who liked products that were considered international and modern, and the fact that mainly middle-aged women in Shanghai wore jade jewellery made me think of jade as catering to a somewhat 'traditional' cultural taste. I had found my method of using counterfeit goods as a window into the social and economic dynamics of Shanghai useful, and decided upon a similar approach for my PhD project. But this time, I wanted to examine interactions and conceptualisations around an object with a longer cultural history and more multifaceted connotations in China than a counterfeit Louis Vuitton bag. I decided upon jade. With this choice I wished to address a sense that while the economic rise of China, in large part due to its opening up to the

[1] *The Telegraph* (15/10, 2016), *The Independent* (16/10, 2016), *Mining.com* (17 October 2016).

[2] The exchange rate was approximately 1 Chinese *Yuan* to US$ 0.16 and Euro 0.12 during my fieldworks.

[3] Their characters alligned along a North-South axis, Beijing is commonly seen as the masculine capital populated by 'political animals', while Shanghai is represented as the feminine cosmopolis, whose inhabitants are commercially minded and open to foreign influences (see, for example, Li 1996; D.

outside world, has been celebrated among some Western social scientists as a step towards 'them' becoming more like 'us', cultural continuities and revivals suggest that China is not going where 'we' are. Culture and history, I felt, had been neglected in favour of a Marxist materialist view upon the economy as a homogenising driver of how Chinese people imagine, act within, and create social worlds, for example in arguement about consumerism as challenging the political status quo (e.g. Davis 2000). China's current authoritarian capitalism exposes an alternative model for economic growth to those of Western liberal democracies, and censorship, surveillance and crackdown on dissent during Xi Jinping's presidency since 2013 has curbed some of the 'openness' I experienced in Shanghai in the mid-2000s.

Meanwhile, hermeneutical and postmodernist scholarship has accentuated human imagination, interpretation, and identity, while downplaying nonhumans as secondary sources of meaning interpreted within pre-configured semiotic structures. But by the 2010s, new paradigms were emerging in social theory, which by embracing diversity - not only in how humans imagine worlds, but also in how nonhumans mediate our imaginations and make up such worlds – have begun to de-centre our taken-for-granted assumptions as highly situated; both as 'Western' scholars and as humans. I found the emphasis on the potentials and efficacies of materialities for human imagining in this 'new' materialism an instructive vantage point for my project.

When I arrived in Shanghai again in 2013 to initiate an ethnographic inquiry into the trade, carving, and consumption of Burmese jadeite jade in China – a material called *feicui* 翡翠 ('kingfisher jade') in Chinese - my friends among the city's young white-collar professionals likewise associated jade with 'traditional' (*youjiu*) China. But what characterised this traditional China and how it related to a supposedly more modern (*xiandai*) China remained for me to find out. My hypothesis was that jade is one material through which some Chinese people imagine and position themselves in a changing society. My research project thus aims to explore jade as a technology of the imagination for people engaging with the material and consequently as a methodological device facilitating a sociological analysis of such imaginations.

When I told Xiao Yan, a 28-year-old journalist working in the communication department of a Shanghai-based division of a multinational financial analysis company, about my interest in jade, her immediate response was that I should talk to her mother. "Young people don't really care about jade, it's mainly women my mother's age, who like that stuff", she said. Like many of her urban peers, Xiao Yan engaged in a consumerist lifestyle that expressed 'openness' (*kaifang*) towards the new

and foreign, while her primary concerns were establishing a career, buying an apartment and finding a suitable husband. She would prefer her wedding ring hosted a diamond. I had known Xiao Yan as an idealistic journalism student, who organised underground film exhibitions on controversial topics such as homosexuality in 2008, but the businesswoman I met in 2013 said she had become more realistic and pragmatic in recent years. While Xiao Yan expressed a need to keep herself adaptable and her pace high in a transformative environment, she also appeared solidly anchored in more continuous aspects of Chinese culture. During our conversations, she - seemingly as a surprise to herself - articulated a detailed knowledge about the history and meanings of jade in China, and wondered whether she would have developed a stronger taste for it by the time she would inherit her mother's jade jewellery. Should she sell the jewellery or keep it? Would she come to recognise its value, and which kind of value would that be?

Similar conversations were repeated during my stay in Shanghai in 2013. My young interlocutors engaged in careers and consumerist lifestyles in a fast-paced transformative market economy, but were highly conscious about their cultural roots, and their self-perceptions comprised a patriotism that seemed to grow with China's economic rise (see also Kleinman *et. al.* 2011: 9). They were aware of the rising economic value of jade, which many compared to consumer goods that were more appealing to their current desires; an iPhone, an overseas holiday, or a car. Most women would eventually receive jade jewellery from their mothers, but suggested such jade hosted properties and relations that restrained their impetus to sell it.

Such incentives and disincentives for selling inherited and gifted jade served as an initial indication of how jade may concretise varous domains. In one domain, jade is an alienable commodity that hosts a quantifiable economic value settled through money as a commensurating yardstick in exchanges. In another domain, jade hosts properties and mediates relations that are difficult to quantify, such as affection. Some ways in which Chinese people engage with jade invites us to think about relations between domains like nonhuman and human, nature and culture, economy and spirituality, materiality and conceptuality. The material tangibility of jade allows it to flow across time and space, specifying different domains like family and market in the process. But jade also hosts an indeterminacy that allows encompasses different domains, forces, and principles like female//male and *yin//yang* simultaneously. Such potentials of jade in transgressing boundaries of difference may objectify, re-constitute, or transform boundaries and content of domains.

The span between domains like gift and commodity is obviously not exclusive to jade. Rather than "searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things", Appadurai (1986) argued that it is more fruitful to look at the commodity-'potential', 'phase', 'state', 'candidacy' or 'situation' of all things by following the 'life-story' of things in different contexts, as "commoditization lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors" (ibid: 13, 15). I suggest that the contexts, manners, and moral implications of how jade comes to occupy and manifest particular domains can provide insights into contemporary Chinese society, including dynamics of continuity and change. For example; what can arguments that jade should not be flashed 'outside' on clothes but should be worn 'inside' against the skin tell us about relations between exteriority and interiority and between jade and humans in China? And what do statements that jade can choose its owner tell us about conceptions of relations between destiny, luck, and agency in a market, where investors can loose millions of *Yuan* by buying stones that may prove empty of jade when cut open? Further, what do suggestions by some consumers that feicui is mined in China, rather than in Myanmar, tell us about how China's global economic expansion and position is imagined by Chinese people? Using jade as a heuristic device, these are some of the questions I address in this dissertation.

## The Philosopher's Stone

Many of Shanghai's jade boutiques are located around cultural landmarks like the Jade Buddha Temple, the Jing An Temple, the Chenghuang Temple and the Yu Yuan Garden, where materials like tea, traditional Han Chinese robes, Buddhist paraphernalia, antique coins, porcelain, calligraphy scrolls, and jade are clustered and sold as indexes of a 'traditional' China. In the jade shops, feicui jewellery is displayed with price tags ranging from a few thousand up to several million *Yuan*, and top-grade feicui is more expensive than gold and in some cases diamonds as measured in grams (Hoffman 2005: 2; Hughes and Kuznetsov 2000: 8; Frey and Lintner 1991: 268).[2] Burmese jadeite (feicui) is by far the most expensive type of jade, but also the favoured white 'mutton fat' nephrite jade (*yangzhiyu*) from China's Xinjiang Province can fetch higher prices than gold (Barnes 2018: 2).

[2] The exchange rate was approximately 1 Chinese *Yuan* to US$ 0.16 and Euro 0.12 during my fieldworks.

In China, jade is used as jewellery, gifts, status symbols, collectors' items and investment objects, and also mediates illicit transactions posited as 'gifts' among businessmen and government officials. Ownership of jade further signals association with Han Chinese high culture, and jade has been packaged as a national symbol in recent years. Carved into symbolically charged shapes like jade Buddhas, jade may more broadly be seen as a vehicle for cosmological imaginings in China.

In the jade shops, the brightly lit showcases for feicui almost invariably host a half-filled glass of water. The shop assistants say the water symbolises the purity and transparent vitreous texture of high quality feicui, which is referred to as 'having water' (*you shui*). We might say that feicui hosts both conceptual and material 'traces' of water. Whether as rivers, amorphous liquid, or purity, water can metaphorically specify human-jade relations in a way of thinking that I with French anthropologist Philippe Descola (2013b: 201-232) shall discuss as a Chinese 'analogical ontology'. But also considered from a 'naturalistic ontology' (ibid: 172-201) water contributes in the creation and manifestations of feicui, as some chemical and mineralogical transformations and deposits that create jadeitites (jadeite-bearing rocks) occur via fluids (Harlow and Sorensen 2005), and some jadeite contains $H_2O$ inclusions (Shi *et. al.* 2010).

In China, jade is sometimes referred to as 'the Philosophers Stone' (*dianjinshi*). Especially in Chapter 7 of this dissertation I discuss how a plethora of terms, concepts, and analogies are attached to, and stimulated by jade in China, which makes jade 'good to think', as Lévi-Strauss (1962: 89) argued about natural species used as totems. I collected printed advertising materials from Chinese jade companies. One company had the following text accompany its company logo, which depicted a river: "The highest motive is to be like water. Water is essential to all life, yet it does not demand a fee or proclaim its importance. Rather, it flows humbly to the lowest level, and in so doing it is much like Tao [Tao/Dao literally means 'the way']". Water ideally flows in an uncontrived manner. This capacity provides a 'natural' ideal for human being and self-cultivation, as manifest in the Taoist ideal of *wu wei* (literally 'non-doing') and in bodily and mental exercises like kung fu, tai chi, and qigong, which are about aligning human movements and energy (*qi*) with the greater flow of life (Fung [1948] 1976: 220-221, 250). Similarly, some Chinese jade carvers express an ideal about aligning themselves with jade in a manner that does not involve excessive effort, such that the jade guides the carver as much as the carver imposes his ideas upon jade.

Rivers are often used as metaphors for the long history of Han Chinese civilisation (*wenming*). As relatively stable domains hosting flows of water, rivers can be posited as a temporal continuity against which an ephemeral present can be conceived. With sources in western mountain ranges, China's three longest rivers flow in an eastward direction. The Yellow River flows into the Bo Sea close to the cultural and political capital of Beijing, the Yangtze River cuts through central China into the East China Sea by the country's financial centre, Shanghai, while the Pearl River flows out into a delta located by the country's prominent contact point with the outside world, Hong Kong. In Han Chinese imaginations, the rivers seem to encompass an evolution from a natural world in the western margins of the empire to the pinnacles of Han Chinese civilisation in the cultural, political, commercial, and cosmopolitan centres of eastern coastal cities, framed as a temporal development from past to present.[3]

A promotional booklet by another jade company includes an image of a jade carving featuring an idiom originally from a tomb inscription by a famous middle Tang Dynasty (766-836 AD) poet. The idiom evokes a temporal perspective that could also point to a principle of origin and manifestation, cause and effect, with the words 'the origin of the river is far away, its flow is long' (*Yuan yuan liu chang*).[4] Trees are sometimes similarly used as metaphors for describing a relation between aimperceptible origin and tangible manifestation. Another idiom from the same Tang Dynasty tomb inscription, which is likewise used as promotional text for a carved jade piece, can be translated as 'the root is deep, the branches exuberant' (*gen shen ye mao*). A jade company, which employs the heart-shaped leaf of the Bodhi tree as its logo, writes in the promotional text accompanying an image of a jade pendant carved as the Buddha, *Fo*: 'Buddha fears the root, mundane people fear the fruit' (*fo wei yin, er fan ren ju guo*). These two latter idioms posit the root as an origin and generative principle from which manifestations perceptible to humans emanate. Chinese jade companies often include depictions of mountains, water, trees, and leaves in their advertising material, which enforce an association of jade with this generative principle. In Chinese jade shops and museums, carved jade figurines are usually set on a holder of carved hardwood, commonly teak or mahogany. The ancient Chinese conceptual scheme of 'five phases' (*wuxing*) – wood, fire, earth, metal, and water –

[3] Their characters alligned along a North-South axis, Beijing is commonly seen as the masculine capital populated by 'political animals', while Shanghai is represented as the feminine cosmopolis, whose inhabitants are commercially minded and open to foreign influences (see, for example, Li 1996; D. Yang 1997; Farrer 2002; Wu 2003).

[4] Chinese idioms are called *chengyu*. Most have a four-character structure, albeit some are longer. Chengyu often express philosophical ideas or moral concepts, and the rhythm and sound of the characters is key to their efficacy.

was used for describing interactions with phenomena. Emphasising *processes* rather than *units*, wuxing posits water as nourishing wood, and the 'watery' quality of jade is specified through the staging of a material-conceptual relation between jade and wood in the exhibitions.

The Kunlun mountain range, which separates the Xinjiang Province from the Tibetan Plateau, hosts China's finest domestic jade, the Hetian nephrite jade. Here, 'mountain jade' is dug out in edgy blocks, while 'river jade' is collected as stones and pebbles in the White Jade River (*Yurunkash* in the local Uyghur language). The distinction between mountain jade and river jade also applies to feicui. 'Mountain feicui' is excavated as boulders from mountains in the Kachin State of Northern Myanmar, while smaller stones of 'river feicui' are collected from the Uru River adjacent to the mines, the lighter river stones carried down from the mountains with the water.[5] In one of many allegories about jade, Confucius (551-479 BC) stated that 'jade is the essence of mountains'. If jade is the essence of mountains, mountains the sources of rivers, and rivers are vessels for the evolution of Han Chinese civilisation, it becomes clear how jade can constitute an origin posited as a generative principle in Chinese thought. The origin of jade is 'far away'; *temporally* in the sense that many jade stones manifest mineralogical processes that have occurred over more than 100 million years, and *spatially* in that jade stones occur in mountains far away from the urban centres in eastern China, where Han Chinese intellectual and cultural tradition for a large part has been defined. Being temporally and spatially 'far away', jade precedes and thereby perspectives a present Chinese society characterised by transformation.

An amorphous, liquid substance, water can transgress boundaries and spill into different domains. Similarly, jade is thought to contain essences and energies, which can enter and affect the human body, for example by stimulating its blood pressure, while jade itself is thought capable of absorbing human essences and flows like 'life energy' (*qi*), and of transmitting cosmological principles like karma. Such interactions connect humans and jade as mutually constitutive, rather than mutually exclusive, domains. This capacity for connecting domains can be inferred from the Chinese character for jade, *yu* 玉, which adds upon that of Emperor, *wang* 王, meaning 'the one who joins heaven and earth'. In the Chinese character for Emperor, the top horizontal stroke represents heaven, the bottom stroke represents earth, and the centre stroke represents man, with a strong vertical stroke connecting the three domains.

[5] The name Burma was officially changed to Myanmar in 1989. My Burmese informants used both names interchangeably, and I do the same in this dissertation.

Jade is often held to mean *purity*, which comes from the water element. Adding a single dot to the character for Emperor - a drop of water - the resulting character is jade; a material and a concept, which, like the Chinese Emperor, constitutes and conjoins domains in a dynamic tension.

## Business and Belief

Located some 2.400 kilometres southwest of Shanghai, my next stop on the jade trail was Kunming, provincial capital of the Yunnan province, which is home to 25 of China's 56 officially recognised ethnic groups, the ethnic minority groups comprising around 38 per cent of Yunnan's population.

For long periods a distinct, independent cultural and administrative entity with close connections to its Southeast Asian and Tibetan neighbours, the incorporation of Yunnan into a 'frontier province' of China has engendered dominant Sino-centric depictions of the area and its history (B. Yang 2009). Depicted as a mysterious backwater frontier of the empire, popular perceptions of Yunnan have been informed by what some scholars call a 'Chinese Orientalism' (see Sigley 2016a: 183), and Yunnanese products like Puer tea have been rediscovered in China's reform era (J. Zhang 2014; Sigley 2015). But while Yunnan's mountainous topography makes up for high cultural and ethnic diversity, people, goods, and ideas have circulated between Yunnan, Southeast Asia, Tibet, and India for more than a thousand years. As Sigley (2016a: 187) notes, "frontiers have always been places of cultural exchange and experiments in hybridity" (see also J. Zhang 2014: 15). While China's current influence on neighbouring countries draws attention, it is also worth noting a historical influence of Southeast Asian culture on Chinese society (Sun 2007).

Resonating with other 'non-statecentric' approaches to Asian borderland areas, B. Yang (2009) employs a processual approach to the history of Yunnan, which he posits as a 'frontier process' and a region in itself, rather than a part of the commonly used regional term 'Southwest China', which includes Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou (ibid: 6-12). While contemporary demand for feicui cannot be understood apart from the cultural history of especially nephrite jade in Han Chinese civilisation, inquiring into the feicui trade necessitates a consideration Yunnan's position as a borderland. Viewing upon the feicui trade solely from Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou provides a somewhat elitist, yet peripheral perspective, which shades the importance of feicui in Yunnan and neighbouring regions. For example, feicui has entered Yunnan from

northern Myanmar since the 13th Century or before, but did not gain widespread use and popularity in China at large until the late 18th Century.

In the contemporary context, 'opening up' policies (*gaige kaifang*) from 1992 sought to connect Yunnan to China's eastern coastal provinces and Southeast Asia, and in the late 1990s, policies to 'develop the West' (*xibu dakaifa*) were mobilised to let China's western provinces, including Yunnan, catch up with the economically more developed east coast. More recently, Yunnan has gained strategic importance for China's glocal economic and geo-political expansion, most prominently under the US$1 trillion 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), a network of roads, railways and shipping lanes that spans more than 60 countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. Under the auspices of the BRI, Yunnan is being developed into a 'bridgehead' for Chinese investments into connectivity and trade with neighbouring Southeast Asian countries through massive infrastructure projects (Sigley 2016a). Alongside highways, these include the 'Pan-Asia Railway Network' that will connect China with Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore. Kunming city itself has seen massive construction in recent years. For example, a Metro system was opened in the city in 2012, and the 461-km$^2$ district of Chenggong was in less than ten years transformed from fields and villages into a peri-urban area with several universities, high-rise apartments, the Kunming City Hall, and an industrial park.

Construction of gated residential communities caters to new aspirations of domesticity and social identities for a rising urban middle-class in Kunming (Zhang 2010). But while buying an apartment as an economic investment and a site for urban living was a prominent aspiration or accomplishment for most people I talked to in Kunming, vast swaths of unoccupied apartment blocks stand naked in the city as residues of intense economic speculation. Writing on the 'ghost town' of Ordos in Inner Mongolia, Woodworth (2019: 40) notes how real state speculation in China that is realised through various forms of informal financing produce 'new ruins', which "provide material reminders of the perpetual reproduction of destruction that is at the centre of capital accumulation". But as Ulfstjerne (2017: 81) argues, also about Ordos, such vacant spaces may function as underdetermined 'blank figures' that fuel imaginations of growth and are "essential to maintain the surface of an impending bubble before it burst". Concurrently, Sigley (2016a: 175) argues, "as this process of 'creative destruction' continues to literally 'terraform' the land/cityscape a simultaneous desire, or nostalgia, for a 'purer' and more 'natural' past also emerges" Jade constitutes one material vehicle for imagining such a 'natural' past. Much like privately owned real estate, feicui engenders economic and social aspirations and

investments that have created a 'bubble-like' market for the material. But like real state, feicui is also vulnerable to policies and macro-economic fluctuations, risking to loose value and be left as residues of intense capitalist speculation in China.

Bordering Myanmar, Yunnan by many accounts hosts the majority of China's total jade trade. However, figures of the volume and value of the feicui trade on both sides of the border are tentative. On the Myanmar side, production output is opaque. Most jade sold in Yunnan is feicui mined around Hpakant in Myanmar's Kachin state, reportedly the source of more than 90 per cent of feicui in the world market. Agents tied to the Myanmar government and military (Tatmadaw) now control the majority of mines, while the ethnic Kachin Independence Army (KIA) still controls some mines. Actors from both sides lease mining concessions to Chinese investors and can have economic and political incentives for not reporting all mining output. Officially, feicui stones are registered and taxed by the Myanmar government before entering China, where an import tax is levied. In practice, both taxes are commonly exempted due to bribes to officials both in Myanmar and in China, and the majority of feicui stones entering China are not registered (Global Witness 2015). Also, there is no standardised yardstick for valuation of feicui, and due to underhand agreements between traders and official valuators values of stones are often registered as lower than actual sales prices when taxation is applied. On the Chinese side, jade traders can reduce taxation by not reporting all transactions to officials. Estimating sales volumes and value in China is further complicated by the fact that many jewellery retailers do not break down sales by gemstone categories (Shor 2017).

Kunming hosts an annual international feicui Expo, and feicui markets and shops are scattered throughout the city. In Kunming, I talked to university students, whose knowledge about, and attachment to jade was deeper than their peers in Shanghai. Most of these students had relatives or friends involved in the feicui trade, but did not consider it a career path matching their educational level. I interviewed feicui traders at the Jinmabiji bazaar; a grid of narrow streets flanked by single-story whitewashed shops with curved, tiled roofs. Most shops sold items like tea, incense, Buddhist prayer wheels, silverware, woodcarvings, and feicui.

I visited A Min's jade shop several times. A local Han Chinese trader in his early 40s, A Min presents himself as a devout Buddhist. He frequently visits his lama in northern Yunnan and dreams about bicycling across Tibet. A Min has done feicui trade for almost 20 years. He started by tapping into the networks of his father's cousin, who owns several jade shops in Kunming. Once every two months, he drives to Ruili to buy un-carved feicui stones (*shitou*). Usually, he buys stones that have been

cut open, which can sometimes expose feicui inside the stone. Other times, he buys stones with a 'window' (*chuang*) grinded into their surface 'skin' (*pifu*), through which feicui 'meat' (*rou*) may be detected by flashing a light through the window. Occasionally, he buys 'betting stones' (*dushi*), which are covered by a layer of opaque skin. In all three versions, it is impossible to know the amount and quality of feicui inside the stone, which will only be revealed when the stone is carved. A Min compares buying un-carved stones to gambling. Distinguishing genuine from counterfeit feicui is not hard, but assessing the presence, amount and quality of feicui in a stone is very difficult. It demands experience, but mostly it is about luck, he says.

After purchasing feicui stones in Ruili, A Min transports them by car or flight to Guangzhou in southeastern China – a journey of around 2000 kilometres - to be carved into jewellery. Guangzhou and the adjacent cities of Jieyang, Sihui, and Pingzhou, all in the Guangdong Province, comprise China's main hub for jade carving, supplying affluent urban consumer markets in eastern China with feicui jewellery and figurines. Different factors, including a long gem carving and trade tradition, more developed infrastructure, and higher labour supply make standard feicui carvings cheaper there. Many feicui stones thus travel along a vast loop from northern Myanmar via Yunnan to the Guangdong province, where they are carved, before returning to Yunnan as carved and polished jewellery.

A Min expresses a strong affection to feicui, and says he 'believes' (*xiangxin*) in the material. As I ask him what he means by that, he tells me a story about a woman, who died, and then 70 years later, somebody opened her grave, discovering that while her flesh had disappeared, her hair remained. A Min says this is because the woman had been buried with a piece of feicui in her hair, which prevents decomposition. He also says feicui attains a darker colour and higher lustre when worn over time, because some of the wearer's *qi* goes into the stone. Quoting a 16$^{th}$ Century book on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), translated as *Materia Medica,* A Min also believes jade brings peacefulness and health to people if they crush and drink it. But A Min says the capacities of jade cannot be described, they need to be experienced.

## Blood Jade and the Jade Disease

From Kunming, I took a 16 hours bus ride to Ruili, a hub for China's import and trade of feicui in western Yunnan, just by the border with Myanmar. Driving west along red, dry hills, the bus made a stop in Dali, capital of the ethnic Bai kingdom of

Nanzhao in the 8th and 9th centuries and the Kingdom of Dali (937-1253) until the Mongols conquered it, and later centre of the Muslim Panthay Rebellion against the Chinese Qing Empire from 1856 to 1863. From Dali, the bus headed southwest, ascending and descending steep mountains and crossing the Mekong River. At the border to the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture (henceforth; the Dehong Prefecture) police thoroughly checked my passport, visa, and plans in Ruili. Comprising an area of around 11.000 $km^2$, the Dehong Prefecture hosts around 1.2 million permanent residents, around half of which are ethnic minorities, Dai and Jingpo being the most populous ethnic groups.

In the Dehong Prefecture, the climate zone had changed from temperate to subtropical, and the hills exuberated a deep, lush green. In the hills, the forest was intersected with swidden clearances and terraced cultivation, mainly of rice and maize. Water buffalo horns adorning village entrances, bamboo houses, and the occasional Christian church demarcated ethnic Jingpo hillside villages. Known as Kachin in Myanmar, Jingpo is an umbrella term for different tribes segmented into exogamous lineages and clans claiming a common ancestor. The Jingpo is believed to have settled in this area in large numbers from the 16th century, and most of China's Jingpo population of around 147.000 resides some 1.500 metres above sea level in these mountains. The Jingpo here they are segmented into five major tribes, Zaiwa being the most populous one, and Longchuan County north of Ruili is considered the heartland of Jingpo in the Dehong Prefecture. Around one million Kachin people inhabit the Kachin State in northern Myanmar, and some 11.000 live in northeast India. Traditionally practicing animist beliefs, many Jingpo have been Christianised from the late 19th Century.

In the valleys, wet-rice, tobacco, and sugarcanes dominate the fields. While the Dehong prefecture's Han Chinese population is mainly settled in the lowland cities of Mangshi, Ruili, Lianghe, and Yingjiang, the lowland villages are predominantly ethnic Dai, the Prefecture's most populous ethnic minority group, which comprises around 370.000 people. The Dai is closely related to Shan people in the adjacent Shan State in Myanmar. Their primary spoken and written language here is Daihong Dai, which belongs to the Tai-Kadai language family and is related to Thai, Lao and Zhuang. The Dai practice Theravada Buddhism. Other ethnic minorities in the prefecture include some 40.000 Achang, 26.000 Lisu, and 15.000 De'ang. Many Achang and De'ang practice Theravada Buddhism due to influence from the Dai, while the Lisu practice Christianity and animism. Jingpo and Lisu languages belong

to the Tibeto-Burman language family, Achang to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and De'ang is a Mon-Khmer language.

This area might be approached as part of 'Zomia', a regional term coined by Willem van Schendel (2002), based on linguistic, religious, cultural, and ecological affinities and ancient trade networks between highland peoples populating a vast area stretching across highland Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Yunnan, Sichuan, Tibet, North India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Presenting an 'anarchist history' of the Zomia region, James Scott (2009) argued that different groups deliberately settled in the mountains to escape lowland nation-state projects of expansion and accumulation, involving slavery, conscription, taxation, corvée labour, and warfare, as well as epidemics. Here in the Dehong Prefecture, mountains and valleys constitute distinctive cultural-ecological zones, separating lowland wet-rice cultivators like Dai, who were historically incorporated into larger political empires and practicing Buddhism from mountain-dwellers like Jingpo, who have engaged in mixed crops farming methods and wild game hunting, while organizing around hereditary nobles, tribal chiefs, kinship, and animism (Seac and Guo 2014: 7-9). But as Leach (1970 [1954]) discusses, the highland and lowland groups engage in intimate interactions, and rather than a static identity, their ethnicity is contingent upon factors like ecology, subsistence, and political organisation. I met many Jingpo-Dai and Han Chinese-ethnic minority couples. I found male-Han/female-ethnic couples more frequent than vice versa, though I do not have statistical evidence to back up this observation.

Demands for a Kachin State in Burma were presented at the Panglong conference of 1947 and armed insurgents have since 1961 under a pan-Kachin identity been engaged in a bloody war with the Burmese government military for more ethnic autonomy (Sadan 2013, 2016). While Jingpo in the People's Republic of China have not suffered state-sanctioned violence on a similar scale as Kachin in Myanmar, some articulated an experience of Chinese modernity in terms of cultural and spiritual loss. Presently, life in these mountains is changing rapidly, as Chinese companies buy up hillside land and log the forests thought to host spirits, while the youth is moving to lowland towns like Ruili to labour in Han Chinese-owned businesses like KTVs (karaoke clubs), restaurants, and hotels.

Han Chinese ideas of mountains constituting an origin can, as noted, address their position as sources of rivers and jade. But they may also manifest as evolutionary perceptions of ethnic mountain dwellers, whether this takes the form of 'civilizing' nation-building projects or a modern fascination with authentic 'noble savages'.

Mountains in China span both an idealized origin and continuity and a less glorious material reality for people inhabiting them. As Oxfeld (2010: 9) writes about the position of ethnic Hakka in the mountains of southeast China: "Mountains are associated with the strength of the family line in traditional thought and *fengshui* [geomancy] principles, but in ordinary discourse mountains are more commonly associated with poverty". While government-sponsored connectivity and 'modernity' has brought wealth to many Han Chinese businessmen in this region, the hill tribes suffer disproportionally from its malcontents, and are heavily inflicted with drug use and HIV. Production of heroin and methamphetamine is concentrated in Myanmar's Kachin and Shan States, and both ethnic insurgent armies and militias under the Tatmadaw have been engaged in the drug trade (Lintner and Black 2009). Smuggled along the same trade routes as feicui, a lot of drugs first enter China through border crossings here in the Dehong prefecture.

Next to the road, construction workers were laying down tubes for a 2.380 kilometre pipeline that now transports oil and gas from the Kyaukphyu port in Myanmar's Arakan State via Ruili to Kunming, thus bypassing shipping routes via the Mellaca Strait. Also a railway and highways are under construction, which will connect the Kyaukphyu port with Mandalay, Ruili, and Kunming, thus revitalising the old 'Burma Road' that supplied the Chinese nationalist army in Chongqing with weaponry during WWII (see Crow 2009). Promoted as the 'China-Myanmar Economic Corridor' (CMEC), these infrastructural projects are making Ruili a spearhead for China's economic expansion into Myanmar.

The bus rolled into Ruili by noon on a sweltering hot day in early March. A taxi driver took me to a hotel opposite Ruili's largest jade market, the Zhubaojie bazaar. While traders also sell rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and amber in Ruili, feicui is by far the most prominent commodity in the city. Ruili hosts a plethora of feicui markets, shops, cutting houses, and carving workshops. Some traders carry jewellery in handbags ready to be presented to buyers in the street, while others haul up feicui stones from underneath the seats of their scooters by teahouses and restaurants. Polished feicui boulders adorn the interior of upscale restaurants and hotels, and carved feicui pieces are cast into the concrete pavement of the 'One Village, Two Countries' cultural park in a nearby village that sits on the border with Myanmar. WeChat, a social media and trade app for mobile devices, features a function that lists online users within a distance of two kilometres. Scanning the profiles of people close to my hotel on different days and times in early 2013 revealed that at most times around one in four had pictures of feicui for sale on their WeChat wall (similar to the

Facebook wall). In Ruili, I started hanging out with feicui traders and carvers, and gradually expanded my network to include government officials and different types of businessmen of different ethnicities in the city.

While Ruili was my primary field site, a journey along the feicui commodity chain would be incomplete without visiting Myanmar. But the overland borders were officially closed to me. I slipped across the border to the city of Muse in Myanmar's Shan State through a hole cut in the border fence to visit underground casinos with Chinese jade traders. But I did not find it safe to do interviews in the casinos, one of which was guarded by uniformed men armed with machine guns, who possibly belonged to the Pan Say militia, a 'People's Militia' under the Tatmadaw.[6] The area was unstable during the time of my research. Anti-Muslim riots spread to northern Shan State in summer 2013; the Northern Alliance - comprised by the Arakan Army (AA), the KIA, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDMA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) - fought the Tatmadaw close to the border; the TNLA clashed with the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), and also attacked a Pan Say-controlled casino in Muse in 2018; and a bit further south, the Kokang region saw clashes between the Tatmadaw and the MNDMA in spring 2015. Also, locals in Ruili said mafia and militia groups are engaged in drug trade, kidnappings, and robberies in Muse.

Due to safety issues and the controversial character of the industry, I could not visit the feicui mines in Myanmar's Kachin State. A ceasefire agreement from 1994 between the KIA and the Myanmar government broke down in 2011, and there was fighting in the Kachin State during my fieldworks, at times also in the mining areas. More than 100.000 Kachin civilians now live in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, many concentrated around Laiza at the Kachin-Yunnan border. A main cause of the renewed fighting is the Myanmar government's selling off of natural resources in Kachin State, including feicui, to military cronies and Chinese companies, and control of the feicui mines is a key to understanding the conflict (see Woods 2011a, 2016; Kiik 2016: 218-220). Given the violence surrounding its mining, it does not seem far-fetched to use the term 'blood jade' about some feicui in Myanmar's Kachin State.

[6] There are at least 90 People's Militia forces throughout Myanmar, including around 10 in Muse. People's Militias are armed groups under the Tatmadaw, many of which are engaged in illegal business like casinos, prostitution, and drug trade with approval of the Tatmadaw. One of the most active groups in Muse, the Pan Say militia is run by a former Shan State leader and the Kaung Khar militia, previously known as the Kachin Defence Army (Frontier Myanmar, 22 October 2018).

I met a Kachin pastor in a Jingpo church outside Ruili, who suggested he could bring me to Laiza, a stronghold of the KIA in Kachin State. He held a border area passport that allowed him to cross the border, and held sermons in the Kachin State and the Dehong Prefecture on a rotational basis. A bus took us to Yingjiang and then ascended a mountain. But 10 kilometres before the border the bus was stopped at a Chinese military checkpoint. Two soldiers entered the bus and grabbed me. The bus left and the soldiers questioned me. They seemed to buy my explanation that I was here to photograph birds, but said I had to go back to Yingjiang "for my own safety". They would find a car going in that direction. A Nissan came by, but they waved it on. Shortly after, a BMW came along, and they told the driver to bring me to Yingjiang. "This car is more suitable for you!" the soldiers grinned. The driver said he was doing business in Kachin State, but fudged my question about the nature of his business. He delivered me at a hotel in Yinjiang, and paid my bill for a night. As I objected to his generosity, he handed me a cigarette with a smile and said "local hospitality". Then he drove off.

Dropping the overland border, I flew to the Kachin State capital of Myitkina via Kunming and Mandalay. I also met Kachin and Rohingya people in Ruili, who traded KIA-controlled feicui stones. The stories of informants combined with reports by journalists and NGOs paint a grim picture of the situation at the feicui mines. The journalists Adrian Levi and Cathy Scott-Clark (2001) visited the feicui mines in the 1990s. They reported that miners would queue up in front of open windows of small shacks, rolling up their sleeves and sticking in their arm for a dose of heroin injected with the same needle throughout the day. Government soldiers, policemen and local officials sold the heroin to the miners (ibid: 306). Also, mine operators "offered their crews pure heroin in lieu of their wages, the value of the powder set against any future jadeite they might find" (ibid: 351). Government officials at the mines reportedly control production and distribute the heroin, and being stationed at the jade mines is allegedly so lucrative that officials are usually obliged to shift turns every six months, this being enough time to be financially set up for life (Frey and Lindtner 1997: 270). Some major jade syndicates are connected to drug smuggling rings, and several "big traders use opium and heroin as currency – to finance the purchase of jade at the mines" (ibid.). The mines appear to be the epicentre of an HIV epidemic, which has swept over the region, including the Dehong Prefecture, carried by people along the jade trade routes. It thus makes sense that HIV is allegedly called 'the Jade disease' in the mining area (Levy and Scott-Clark: 306, 331, 339-340).

My reverse journey along the commodity chain presented above has followed feicui from Shanghai to the China-Myanmar borderlands and then to Myanmar's Kachin State. This journey underlines that there is always more than one perspective to an issue. Outlining some uses of jade in China - as an economic investment, an index of 'traditional' national culture, a status object, and an object of spiritual attachment and cosmological imagining - I have also pointed to military conflicts, drug trade, drug use, and HIV as darker consequences of feicui mining in Myanmar's Kachin State. Delineating a spectrum of meanings, potentials and effects of feicui, I have sought above to illustrate why a material called 'the Philosopher's Stone' in China could aptly be labelled 'Blood Jade' in Myanmar. The remainder of this dissertation comprises an account of some ways in which feicui is intimately tied to the economic, social, spiritual and material lives of people in different nodes of the commodity chain, with particular focus on Ruili, where most feicui first enters China.

## Outline of the Dissertation

Using jade as a prism for visualising a spectrum of domains and themes, the structure of this dissertation is perhaps 'analogical', more so than 'linear'. The remaining eight chapters explore eight themes: Materiality, Configuration, Opacity, Visibility, Congruity, Fissure, Order, and Potential. The chapters are connected by their focus on interplays between materiality and conceptuality. Chapter 1 and 2 discuss theory and methodology. The remaining chapters zoom in from macro-, to micro-level; from *context* to *market* to *social interactions* to *trader*, and then to *feicui* itself.

*Chapter 1 (Materiality)* presents the theoretical focus and key concepts of the study, and outlines some historical and contemporary uses and meanings of jade in China and beyond. The chapter proposes a 'non-linguistic' approach to material things that focuses on their potentials in informants' worlds and in social analysis. The chapter then discusses how studies of commodity chains can objectify domains and their contents by following flows of things in time and space. Drawing upon a renewed focus on materiality, the chapter points to roles of feicui and other materials in manifesting and guiding assumptions about the world in China.

*Chapter 2 (Configuration)* discusses the interactive formation of my fieldwork data. The chapter first discusses how my fieldworks developed in contingency with the temporal and spatial development of Ruili's feicui markets. Next, it outlines some forms of interactions and exchanges that informants and I engaged in, and considers

their ethical implications. Finally, the chapter presents three cases that demonstrate how analytical themes emerged through my interactions with informants.

*Chapter 3 (Opacity)* outlines a history of the Myanmar-China feicui trade, main routes through which feicui currently enters China legally and illegally, and how the cross-border trade is structured and practiced. The chapter then discusses relations between the feicui industry, drug trade, drug use, and HIV in Myanmar-China borderlands. Finally, the chapter presents three cases from three sites – Myitkina, Mandalay, and Shanghai - that illustrate how knowledge and ignorance is differentially configured, distributed, and productive in the feicui commodity chain. With Proctor's (2008) concept of 'agnotology', I propose attention to both the production and productivity of lack of knowledge.

*Chapter 4 (Visibility)* situates Ruili's jade markets in Yunnan and Dehong, and outlines organisation, practices, resources, and skills in Ruili's jade trade. The chapter then highlights a tension between a traditional bazaar trade with face-to-face interactions, where knowledge about feicui is key, and a rising impersonal online trade, where buyers' lack of tactile engagements with feicui invites suspicions of fraud and counterfeiting. The chapter then discusses 'exhibition environments' in feicui companies, and distinguishes between jade carving as industrial production, craft, and art. Finally, the chapter discusses investments and value in markets and exhibitions of wealth in the jade world in terms of self-reinforcing principle.

*Chapter 5 (Congruity)* examines how *guanxi* - functional relationships and interaction forms that also manifest a relational constitution of Chinese personhood - underpin Chinese feicui trade. The chapter first outlines culturalist and institutionalist approaches to guanxi, and discusses how guanxi matters in economic fluctuations in Ruili's gemstone markets, as feicui can mediate guanxi relations that take the form of bribery. The chapter then presents some examples of how guanxi can forge reciprocities and trust that facilitate personalised transactions in non-contractrual markets, and considers how male guanxi interactions are mediated by women, who contribute to the masculine 'face' of Chinese businessmen, and by materialities like cigarettes, alcohol, and tea. Finally, the chapter discusses how one trader navigates between 'exteriorised' guanxi relations and 'interiorised' friendships.

*Chapter 6 (Fissure)* presents narratives of an ethnic Rohingya feicui trader, which show how the jade trade comprises business alliances across ethnic affiliations. Meanwhile, ethnic conflicts in Myanmar risk spilling over the border to Ruili, and high economic stakes in the jade trade carry a potential of conflicts that may dissolve common ethnic and social loyalties. The chapter demonstrates how particular

potentials of nonhuman actors, in this case fighting cocks and dogs, can mediate human imaginations of such ethnic alliances and conflicts.

*Chapter 7 (Order)* discusses how mineralogical properties and ontological assumptions interplay in Chinese valuations of feicui. Outlining a vernacular Chinese nomenclature for feicui in Ruili, the chapter demonstrates how singular feicui pieces are made commensurable and valued through classifications that could exemplify what Descola (2013b) calls 'analogical ontology'. The chapter further relates how some male Han Chinese feicui traders in Ruili linked a vernacular hierarchy of value for feicui to an ethnified hierarchy of value for women. Finally, the chapter considers how certain feicui pieces function as 'exemplars' or 'prototypes' that guide a crystallisation of consumer demand.

*Chapter 8 (Potential)* asks why Chinese people value jade so highly. Examining relations between material properties of feicui and its economic and spiritual potentials in China, the chapter discusses the realization of these potentials as determination of the indeterminate. An opaque layer of surface skin constitutes feicui stones as partially indeterminate by hiding their content. This invites investments of labour, meaning, and value that engender intimate human interactions with feicui. Exploring how the materiality of feicui contributes in its determination and in conditioning of humans, the chapter adds a post-anthropocentric perspective to a structuralist analysis of human-jade interactions as mutually constitutive of both entities.

The *Conclusion* summarises the argument, and the *Epilogue* considers prospects for a more ethical feicui industry.

**1.** Miners examine a slag pile for jadeite stones in northern Myanmar's Kachin State. © Minzayar Oo

**2.** Jadeite miners inject heroin at a mining camp in northern Myanmar's Kachin State. © Minzayar Oo

**3.** Jadeite bracelets for sale at a market in Ruili. Photo by the author.

# 1. Materiality: Theoretical Approach

> There are other worlds around us. Too often, we pass through them unknowing, seeing but blind, hearing but deaf, touching but not feeling, contained by the limits of our senses, the banality of our imaginations, our Ptolemaic certitudes.
>
> - Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia*, p.12

> I bring you my poor dreams
>
> Caught up in a green jade bowl
>
> Carved untold years ago
>
> Out of a Chinese soul
>
> - Barbara Hutton, in Levy and Scott-Clark, *The Stone of Heaven*, p. 243

Often hailed as the greatest Chinese classical novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*hongloumeng*), also called *The Story of the Stone* (*shitouji*), was written by Xueqin Cao in the mid-18th Century, and details life in two branches of a wealthy aristocratic clan in Beijing. Depicting "the glory of the clan's heyday, as well as the corruptions, frustrations, despair, and finally the decline and fall of the clan", the story also evokes conflicts between material and spiritual worlds, the mundane and idealistic, predestined marriage and love, and between Confucianism and Taoism-Buddhism (Kao 1980: 109-110, 115). The first chapter relates how one stone remained when the goddess Nüwa fashioned stone blocks for the repair of the heavens. This stone could see, listen, and speak, and "after having undergone a process of refinement, attained a nature of efficiency, and could, by its innate power, set itself into motion and was able to expand and contract" (Cao 2010: 2). Contracted into a "newly-polished and brilliantly clear" jade stone "no larger than the pendant of a fan" (ibid: 3), the stone is picked up by a Buddhist bonze and a Taoist priest, and taken with them to see the world. The stone is later incarnated in the boy Jia Baoyu (*baoyu* 宝玉 means 'precious jade'), who "had, at the time of his birth, a piece of variegated and crystal-like brilliant jade in his mouth" (ibid: 29). Baoyu exhibits the 'jade-like' feminine qualities of purity and idealism, as opposed to the masculine Confucian ideal of discipline and the worldly glory of officialdom. Baoyu's father disciplines him

for his lack of interest in the Confucian classics and in studying for the civil service examinations, while only being interested in his female companions (Kao: 113).

The role of the piece of jade in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* exemplifies how jade in China can concretise a tension between domains (mundane, material, practical, male *versus* celestial, spiritual, ideal, female), and can specify human qualities. Nonhumans animated with human properties and perspectives obviously feature in literature and ethnographies beyond the Chinese context. For example, the narrator in Danish novelist Ib Michael's (1997) book *Prince* is a spirit that takes on different material forms, including that of amber. Michael's novels are inspired by the 'magical realism' of a Latin American literary tradition that adds magical events to mundane accounts. Also, some discussions of 'cosmological perspectivism', which concern how humans and nonhumans see themselves and one another, hail from studies of animist groups in South America (e.g. De Castro 2012; Descola 2013b: 138-143; Kohn 2013). Philippe Descola (2013b: 129-240) compares animism, totemism, naturalism, and analogism as four 'ontological modalities of identification' based on resemblances and differences on the level of interiorities and physicalities:

> "Now each redefined as one of the four combinations allowed by the interplay of resemblances and differences between the self and the Other at the levels of interiority and physicality, animism and totemism, along with naturalism and analogism, become elementary components of a kind of syntax for the composition of the world, from which the various institutional regimes of human existence all stem" (Descola: 125).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Similar interiorities<br>Dissimilar physicalities | **Animism** | **Totemism** | Similar interiorities<br>Similar physicalities |
| Dissimilar interiorities<br>Similar physicalities | **Naturalism** | **Analogism** | Dissimilar interiorities<br>Dissimilar physicalities |

**4.** Descola's scheme of four ontological modalities of identification (Descola: 122).

Descola (p. 129) broadly defines *animism* as "the attribution by humans to non-humans of an interiority identical to their own", and the ability of the jade stone in Cao's book to see, listen, and speak could be seen as exemplifying an 'animist' approach to jade insofar as humans and jade in the story exhibit dissimilar physicalities, but similar interiorities. But rather than proposing a single exclusively animist Chinese ontology, I seek to highlight how different ontological potentials of

jade - deriving from its intrinsic properties and human engagements with it throughout Chinese cultural history - are actualised in different contexts.

Descola characterises Modern Western societies as *naturalist*, insofar as we posit nature or physicality as universally fixed, but culture or interiority as variable. This has given rise to our carving out of 'nature' as a separate domain for human knowledge and intervention (see also Scott 1998). When gemmology, the science of gemstones, separates between nephrite and jadeite jade on the basis of their different chemical microstructure (even when they exhibit similar visible characteristics), the discipline exhibits a naturalist ontology in assuming a relative constancy of 'nature' that people may *perceive* differentially. This way of ordering the world manifests in gemmological certificates issued to create consumer trust in the authenticity of feicui in Chinese markets. Some descriptions of jade in China also point to what Descola calls *analogical ontology*, where interiority and physicality is fragmented in every being into multiple components. Here, a wide variety of singular phenomena are ordered through analogies: "Thanks to the interplay of rules founded upon analogy, reversion, and pairing, a universe that is fractured by multiple discontinuities becomes intelligible in all its connections" (ibid: 228). Descola suggests, "the ecology of an organism constituted by many wandering elements that cohabit in a more or less harmonious fashion must surely evoke the image of a world in miniature" (ibid: 218). Some respondents posit basic forces like *yin* and *yang* as underpinning, cutting across, and mutually constituting humans and nonhumans like jade. We might propose the term iterative holism to capture such ideas of different phenomena manifesting iterations of basic forces, similarities, and differences. Meanwhile, analogies between visual purity of jade and spiritual purity of people could also be considered *totemist* in assuming congruity between physical and interior qualities.

While Descola's model of four ontological modalities - and more generally the 'ontological turn' in anthropology - has been criticised for replacing culture with ontologies as static, essential orientations that constructs incommensurable difference between different people, I employ Descola's model as what Fiskesjö (2017: 243) calls a 'heuristic device', in this case for identifying potentials of feicui in China.[7]

[7] Fiskesjö (2017) criticises Descola's ontological modalities as entailing a risk of essentialism if they are suggested as "set features of specific human communities" (ibid: 243). Kapferer (2014: 398) sees in Descola's ontological modalities a "deep-seated statis" and "little consideration of the historical forces that might give rise to one distinctive ontological direction from out of the other". In Kapferer's reading, Descola's four-fold ontological schema operates with a Eurocentric dualism that tends "to totalize perceptual or perspectival categories with little in the way of internal multiplicity let alone embodied multiplicity" (ibid: 391). Vigh and Sausdahl (2014) question how we can capture radically

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are commonly seen as main philosophical foundations of Chinese thought (Fung ([1948] 1976: 3). Alongside Descola's ontologies, these are localised theories about the world that can manifest in how Chinese people talk about feicui. Chinese approaches to jade may evoke animist, naturalist, analogist, totemist, Buddhist, Confucianist, and Taoist ways of reasoning in different contexts. Feicui manifests a configuration of different chemical and physical components and processes. Likewise, human engagements with the material do not index one 'pure' ontological modality, but rather a configuration of ways of reasoning in different contexts and situations that draw upon a *repertoire* of intellectual resources, rather than a single, static one. Examining how these ways of thinking about, with, and through jade configure and develop in different contexts may tell us something about dynamics of continuity and change in Chinese economy, society, and culture.

Given that amber has been processed into jewellery in Denmark since 9.000 BC or before and has since been used as jewellery, and object for trade, medicine, magic, and industry (Faber, Frandsen, and Ploug 2000: 32-45, 96-107), it does not seem coincidental that Michael's 'Danish' spirit-narrator takes the form of amber. Likewise, given the historical importance of jade in China, jade seems a suitable prism for visualising domains in Chinese culture in Cao's book.

## Focus of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines material, economic, social, and cultural aspects of carving, trade, and consumption of Burmese jadeite, or feicui, the highest valued type of jade in China. It inquires into relations between 1) material properties of feicui; 2) social and economic organisations, interactions, and practices in the Myanmar-China cross-border feicui trade and carving industry; and 3) historical and contemporary imaginations underpinning Chinese demand for feicui.

Concomitant with growing Chinese cross-border trade, wealth and consumption, corruption, national cultural revivals, and fluctuations in other sectors for economic investment, Chinese markets have especially since the 1990s seen a boom in trade volumes and prices of feicui. In gemmology, jade refers to two distinct materials: Jadeite and nephrite. Jadeite is a silicate of sodium, aluminium and iron, part of the

essential ontological difference methodologically, and point to political risks in constructing essential Otherness.

pyroxene family, with an interlocking granular structure and a hardness of 6 ½ to 7 on Moh's scale. Nephrite is a magnesium-rich amphibole with an interwoven fibrous structure and a hardness of 6 to 6 ½. Both jadeite and nephrite are subsumed under the generic Chinese term for jade, *yu*, which has historically referred to a wider array of beautiful stones suitable for carving (Walker 1991: 22; Barnes 2017: 1).[8] The English word jade derives from a mispronunciation of the Spanish term *piedra de ijada*, or 'loin stone' (*ijada* means flank of the lower back), which was first recorded in 1565, and rooted in a belief among Aztecs that jade could cure ailments of the loin and kidneys. Hence French '*éjade*', Italian '*giade*', and English 'jade'. Mesoamerican jade was jadeite (Hacking 2007: 270). The Chinese term feicui (Kingfisher jade) designates the similarity of the preferred brilliant emerald-green colour of jadeite to that of the feathers of the Kingfisher bird. Relatively unknown in Western markets, feicui can fetch sky-high prices in China. For example, a necklace of 27 jadeite beads, originally a wedding gift to Barbara Hutton, American socialite and heiress to retail tycoon Frank Winfield Woolworth, was sold at a Sotheby's auction in Hong Kong in 2014 for US$ 27.44 million.

The dissertation takes two main approaches to feicui. First, especially Chapter 3, 4, 5, and 6 outline organisations, networks, strategies, practices, and interactions in the cross-border feicui industry to show what people *do* to make economic value from feicui. Secondly, examining *how* Chinese people value feicui and *why* they value it so highly, Chapter 7 and 8 discuss how material properties of feicui interplay with ontological assumptions. These chapters are thus about how people *think* about feicui, and how this thinking is conditioned by the materiality of feicui. This approach draws upon theorising ascribed with labels like 'new materialism' and 'object-oriented ontology'.

The theoretical underpinnings of the study primarily derive from studies in non-Western contexts. First, scholars have used local phenomena and concepts in China to theorise (post)socialist mundane and ritual economy, social networks, and interactions, which can illuminate how materiality and sociality interplay with economic organisation form in how feicui is traded in China. One example is my discussion in Chapter 5 of the role of *guanxi* (a particular form of relationship and interaction in China) in the feicui trade. Secondly, 'non-statecentrist' approaches to spaces, economies, and identities in highland Asian borderland regions have

[8] For an introduction to the history, archaeology, and gemmology properties of jadeite, see for example Walker (1991); Keverne (1991); Rawson (1996); Shi, Wang, Chu and Chui (2009); Nyunt, Massonne and Sun (2017); Harlow and Sorensen (2005); Barnes (2018); Demattè (2016); Schuman ([1976]: 170-171); Hughes *et. al.* (2000).

highlighted local and regional connections and disconnections across national borders, which are useful in thinking about feicui trade in the Myanmar-China borderlands. Here, I convey everyday interactions, practices, and narratives that often do not comply with state-defined laws and narratives. Thirdly, discussions of non-Western ontologies, for example in Ameriindian, North Asian, and Melanesian contexts, are useful as references for considering Chinese conceptions of jade as animated with human qualities and as hosting energies, properties, and principles that in Chinese cosmology can manifest in both humans and nonhumans. Encompassing different domains, jade can be seen as both 'dead' and 'animated' matter. Some consider jade a commodity like any other. Others animate jade as an agent hosting medicinal, spiritual, and social properties and effects. Rather than determining jade as either//or, I seek to convey how and why different potentials of jade are actualised in different contexts.

The aim and argument of the dissertation is methodological in the sense that I seek to convey how examining jade affords a visualisation of Chinese economy, society, and cosmology and its effects beyond China. I adopt an inductive approach that allows jade a potential for theorising. Theories and the values they often express can obstruct knowledge. This is sometimes the case when non-western realities are squeezed into explanatory models built from studies of Western societies. Some scholars got China wrong by abstracting from its pre-socialist history and sub-official cultures and by assuming that changing economic organisation forms would dictate particular political, social, and cultural forms. As Osburg (2013: 187) argues, China's development has so far disproved assumptions of social scientists "steeped in the ideological assumption that markets beget freedom". Ideologically motivated expectations that most Chinese crave liberal democracy and that China is on the path to becoming one seem mostly valid as theories about 'us' than about 'them'. To understand informants' statements and practices, we need to take them seriously on their own terms. In this dissertation, this involves embracing that what constitutes 'the world', 'humans', and 'objects' can be quite different in China from what we may believe universally true. Following Descola's call for rethinking our naturalist separation between a single, constant, universal nature and variable cultures allows for considering distinctiveness of worlds, humans, and nonhumans, rather than exclusively proposing distinct human perceptions of them.

The remainder of this chapter discusses some key concepts used in the dissertation. First, I propose the concepts of 'spectrum' and 'spectre' as metaphors for how material and conceptual domains emerge from examining Chinese engagements with

feicui, and then present some meanings and uses of jade in China and beyond. Next, I discuss 'materialism' and 'idealism' as two morally charged approaches to potentials of jade in China. Based on 'new materialist' and 'ontological' theorising, the chapter then outlines a 'non-linguistic' approach to material things that focuses on their efficacies in human worlds and in social analysis, and demonstrates how studies of 'the social life of things' can objectify domains and their contents by following flows of things in time and space. Finally, I make some remarks about dynamics of change and continuity in contemporary China.

## Spectrum and Spectre

The title of this dissertation, 'Spectral Jade', is meant to propose that examining how Chinese people talk about, and engage with jade reveals a spectrum of domains that comprises both the material/actual and the virtual/spectral.

Gemmologists employ several methods to determine the authenticity of gemstones, but optical characteristics are of unsurpassed importance (Schumann 1976: 31). If you stand in a swimming pool and look down, your legs seem positioned at a different angle from your upper body. This phenomenon is caused by the *refraction* of light. When a ray of light leaves one medium, like air, and enters into another, like water, the light will be refracted at the interface between the two media (ibid: 36). As the amount of refraction of light in crystals is constant for each gemstone, it can be used in its identification. The amount of refraction is called the 'refractive index', and is defined as the proportional relation between the speed of light in air and that in stone, which is measured with a *refractometer* (ibid.). Another method is by determining the 'absorption spectrum', which consists of bands that appear in the spectral colors of light as they emerge from the gemstone. Certain wavelengths (colour bands) of the light are absorbed, and the colour of the gem is formed from the mixture of the remaining parts of the original white light. Many gems have a unique absorption spectrum, which is revealed in black vertical lines, when looking through a *spectroscope* (ibid: 44).

The adjective *spectral* has two meanings. First, spectral can pertain to a *spectrum*, a word first used scientifically in optics to describe the rainbow of colours in visible light after passing trough a *prism*. A spectrum can thus characterise how the input of *phenomena* (light) into an *instrument* (prism) is scattered into *domains* (colours) and thus determined as human *concepts* (rainbow). Appropriating metaphorical potentials

of the gemmological methods noted above, I employ feicui as an instrument (prism, refractometer, or spectroscope) for visualising a spectrum of material and conceptual domains in China, including their contents, boundaries, and interrelations. Categorisations of domains are ways of conceptually ordering worlds, and in that sense comprise ontological assumptions, and I posit jade as both a perspective into, and an element of Chinese ontologies.

Secondly, spectral can be an adjective for *spectre*, which can refer to spirit, ghost, and shadow. In this sense, spectral characterises a *potentiality*; something virtual-yet-actual, a sort of looming presence that "teeters on the border between being-there and not-being-there", as Bubandt (2018: 4) writes about how weather is now haunted by anthropogenic climate change. A shadow is a good example. With light behind us, we can see our shadow. But we gannot grab it, it moves with us, and without our body and light it is not there. It is immaterial, intangible, amorphous, and contingent. In the previous chapter, I noted how feicui carries both conceptual and material 'traces' of water (*shui*). The 'water' in feicui does not wet our hands, but may be seen as one its *spectral potentials* that can signify both visual purity in feicui and 'jade-like' spiritual purity in people. Also, while feicui is treasured for its 'actual' visual characteristics, the trade in skin-covered 'betting stones' is predicated upon their opacity and indeterminacy, which drives traders to invest in something they cannot fully see or know.

## Jade in China

Nephrite jade has been used in China for at least 8.000 years (Keverne 1991; Rawson 1996; Yu 2009; Barnes 2017). The earliest pieces found are tools and ornaments from early middle Neolithic (ca. 6500–5000 BC) sites in northeastern China (Demattè 2006: 211-212).

The significance of nephrite jade in middle-to-late Neolithic contexts (4500-2000 BC) has led some Chinese scholars to suggest a 'Jade Age' in China, creating a Chinese Four Age system (Stone, Jade, Bronze, Iron) unlike the Three Age system (Stone, Bronze, Iron) often used in Western contexts. While this classification has been criticised as representing a Chinese mytho-nationalist agenda, Demattè (2006: 203) sees in it a "necessity to highlight the presence of alternative frameworks for interpretation beyond those developed within the Western intellectual tradition". Chinese archeological records show a surge in jade in the late Neolithic (3000–2000

BC) associated with increasing urbanism (ibid: 204). *Yuejue Shu*, a compilation from the first century AD, proposed a Four Age System, in which the Jade Age was a "historical phase to be analysed within an evolutionary framework" (ibid.). In the text, a savant during the Warring States period (fifth to third centuries BC) stated: "By the time of Huangdi ['Yellow Emperor', 2697-2597 BC], weapons were made of jade to fell trees, build palaces and mine the earth. Jade was also a material with spiritual qualities" (ibid: 203). This account thus suggests both utility uses and spiritual qualities of jade in China almost 5.000 years ago. In the context of growing national pride since the 1980s, discoveries of Neolithic jades contributed to the resurrection of the *Yuejue Shu* idea of a Jade Age (ibid: 206).

Rawson (1996) dismisses the Jade Age by arguing that Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages are scientific categories signalling material advances in tools and weapon manufacture impacting farming and fighting, thereby proposing a *ritual-utilitarian divide* as a rationale for age-naming. But Demattè argues that as jade production soared, settlements grew in size and complexity, socioeconomic and gender inequality expanded, and symbolic signing systems that gave way to writing, proliferated. Thus, "jade, as a material and as an industry, may have contributed to economic and ideological changes, lending support to the concept of 'Jade Age'" (Demattè: 208). While some jades likely had only ceremonial use, axes and blades could be used in everyday activities, and Demattè sees a clear-cut ritual//utilitarian distinction as a fallacy (ibid: 210). The materiality of nephrite induced more complex technologies than those used on stone (ibid: 217). Due to the compact texture of nephrite, chipping and flaking is unsuitable, and objects are shaped by grit abrasion as different tools (strings, drills, awls, lathes) carry a sand–water mixture harder than nephrite. Larger grained sand was used for cutting, and finer for polishing. Also today, jade cutting, carving, and polishing in China is done with metal saw blades and drills mixed with silica sand.

Ming Yu (2009: 13-14) lists six major uses of jade throughout Chinese history: 1) 'Ritual jade' was used in sacrifices and other ceremonies. 2) 'Hierarchy Jade', which includes belt ornaments and palace beads, was used by rulers of all dynasties to distinguish social status. 3) 'Funerary jade' was used to preserve bodies: "In Chinese history, when burying bodies, jade was believed to make both bodies and souls immortal and even to help souls enter heaven and gain a new life" (ibid: 14). 4) 'Ornamental jade' includes hairpins, earrings, rings, necklaces and belt hooks. 5) 'Utilitarian jade' includes such tools as axes, knives, shovels, washers, paperweights, seal boes, incense burners, bowls and kettles. 6) 'Decorative jade' was – and still is -

used for enjoyment and display: "Royalty, nobility, rich businessmen and scholars liked to place jade artwork on shelves or desks to show off wealth or sophistication" (ibid.).

Going by these distinctions, Utilitarian and Funerary jades are less significant today, where the prevalent forms of carved jade are as jewellery and figurines, the roles of which are to express and contemplate meanings like status, beauty, refinement, and cultural-temporal continuity. As Walker (1991: 26) argues: "Over time, as metals were discovered, civilizations transferred their attitude of respect for jade as a purely functional object to one of reverence for its religious, symbolic and / or purely aesthetic value". This change was well underway when jadeite became more prevalent in China from the late 18th century. While jadeite is *harder* than nephrite, the latter is *tougher* and does not break as easily due to its interlocking fibrous structure, which may have made it more suitable as a tool. The use of jade as jewellery and figurines places greater emphasis on its visual characteristics, and the 'new' jadeite became revered in China for being more transparent, translucent, glossy, and featuring higher lustre and shinier colours than nephrite. Today, jade is increasingly used as an object of economic investment, which likewise adds emphasis on its visual characteristics. Based on literature and my fieldworks, I present seven main historical and contemporary roles of jade in China below.

1) *Medicinal object*. Taoist scholars drank elixirs containing crushed jade to attain immortality and wisdom, and to stimulate to sexual potency. In a sexual reference book from the three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties (AD 221-581), "instructions were given for an elixir whose main ingredient was powdered jade", and the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) instructed her eunuchs "to collect dew in a bronze plate that was mixed with powdered jade into an elixir of life" (Lévy and Scott-Clark: 93, 159). I shall discuss later how some of my informants pointed to medicinal properties of jade today.

2) Different ritual jades were used as *vehicles for communication with the spirits.* Many of my informants associated jade with a spiritual domain, and some suggested that jade can choose its owner, thus animating the material with agency and will. A printed advertise for a piece of carved feicui in Ruili read: "Thousands of hammerings, thousands of forgings, a spirit is attached" (*tian chu bai lian jingling fu*). The 'spirit' (*jingling*) attached to the jade could be seen as a result both of its 'natural' creation in mountains and of the carver's 'hammerings' and 'forgings' of the stone.

3) *Vehicle for communicating social relations*. Jade jewellery is commonly given as gifts and inheritance in China. A friend from Shanghai visited me in Ruili with her

parents. Her father wanted to buy a feicui bracelet for his wife. I joined the family's hunt for the right piece of feicui in five different shops, which lasted a full afternoon. Eventually, the mother chose two green feicui bracelets with a patch of orange, for which the father paid 20.000 *Yuan*. The mother described 'meeting' the two bracelets as love at first sight and said they felt familiar to her, because her grandmother had a jade bracelet in the same colours. She said her daughter would inherit the bracelets, and felt that by wearing them, they would absorb her spirit and soul, which would be passed on to her daughter via the jade. Five year later, the daughter five years later, she wore one of the bracelets, which she always keeps on her wrist, even when showering and sleeping. In this case, the feicui bracelets communicated love, memory, and spirit between great-grandmother and mother, husband and wife, and mother and daughter.

4) Jade *manifests human moral virtues*. Ming Yu (2009: 65) notes how in the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) "Wearing jade pendants was associated with the spiritual world, words, conduct, and moral cultivation. As a way of conveying ambition through physical materials, jade was used to show the character, sentiments, qualities, and grace of the owner". We also saw how in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* jade signified spiritual purity, and in Chapter 8 I discuss how Confucian analogies between jade and human virtues guide a perception of mutual human-jade cultivation especially among jade carvers.

5) *Symbol of wealth, status, and sophistication*. Previously, primarily royalty and noblemen were allowed to, and could afford to wear jade. Its connotations of luxury and social stratification made jade ambiguous in the Mao-era, whereas new rich Chinese today use jade in attempts to convert economic capital into cultural capital. But as I discuss in Chapter 7 and 8, jade is a highly singular material and 'reading' it demands substantial knowledge about its materiality and cultural history, making its 'translation' into wealth and status less straightforward than that of, for example, gold.

6) Chinese archaeologists' proposition of a 'Jade Age' may reflect attempts to posit jade as a *symbol of national identity*. This connotation was revived at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, where the Chinese seals displaying the Olympic emblems were made of domestic nephrite jade. The jade seals were meant to symbolize four concepts characterizing the Olympics: Benevolence (the generosity of the Olympic spirit); Wisdom (the enterprising spirit, innovation and progress of the Olympics); Courage (the unyielding character of jade implying the 'faster, higher, stronger' spirit advocated by the Olympics); and Purity (jade is clear, which symbolises purity as

characterizing the noble and pure Olympic spirit) (Yu 2009: 142). The Olympic gold, silver, and bronze medals were embedded with white, light-green, and dark-green nephrite jade, respectively. For Chinese jade scholar Ming Yu, jade contributed in making the Olympics a source of Chinese national identity and pride: "A perfect integration of Chinese jade culture gave the Olympics a strong Chinese flavor and oriental style, and embodied the hospitality of the Chinese nation" (ibid: 143). Yu's book concludes in patriotic fashion by positing jade as a spiritual symbol uniting Chinese people under the nation: "Its history constitutes an epic that records the artistic creativity and indomitable spirit of the Chinese nation and inspires the Chinese people of today to strive increasingly for greatness" (ibid: 144).

I attended an auction of Chinese jades at the auction house Bonhams in London. The historical origins of the pieces were not clearly demarcated, but many were likely brought to Europe following the looting of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing by Anglo-French forces in 1860 during the Second Opium War. Chinese bidders brutally outbid their Western counterparts at the auction. The Opium Wars, the looting of the Summer Palace, and concessions of territory to colonial powers represent national humiliation in China. The ability to outbid Europeans in a European jade auction exhibited the economic power of a 'new' capable China, in which jade expresses national pride, even if some people now experience China itself as a colonial aggressor in northern Myanmar's jadeite industry.

7) Jade is increasingly used an *economic investment object* in China. Valuables from real estate to art, antiques, tea, liquor, plants and animals, wood, and gemstones have been subject to immense investments and price fluctuations in post-Mao China's economy. As vast sums of sometimes illicitly obtained money seek a 'safe home', new investment fads make materials and species highly valuable in short time. Gifted between businessmen and government officials, jade is also currently associated with corruption (*fubai*) in China.

**5.** (Top) Silver, gold, and bronze medals for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. In the medals are inlaid light green, 'mutton-fat' white, and dark green nephrite jade. (Bottom) Barbara Hutton's jadeite necklace, sold for $27.44 million in Hong Kong. High-grade jadeite is more transparent, translucent, and shiny than nephrite.

## Jade Beyond China

Nephrite is found in numerous places, including Mainland China, Taiwan, BC Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Alaska, California, Oregon, Washington State, USSR, Poland, Italy, and Switzerland. It has also circulated throughout Southeast Asia. A study that examined Southeast Asian nephrite jade with electron probe microanalysis traced carved jade ear pendants excavated in various sites in the Philippines, East Malaysia, Southern Vietnam and Peninsular Thailand to a single source in Eastern Taiwan, and argued for the existence of a 3.000 km-diameter trade halo from 3000 BC to the first millennium AD (Hung *et.al.* 2007).

Jadeite deposits are also found throughout the world, including in Guatemala, Japan, Russia, and California (Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 2). For example, 88 different outcrops of jadeite have been identified in the polar Ural Mountains since 1989, while Hughes and Kuznetsov (2000: 7) reported on the find of a jadeite boulder the size of a house in Khakassia in Siberia. Keverne (1991: 8) characterises China as a 'nephrite culture region', whereas historically the only 'jadeite culture region' is in Mesoamerica. Central American jadeite was mainly burial types, but the Mayan jade culture also produced domestic items (ibid: 12). No deposits in the world have produced jadeite quality matching top-grade jadeite from Myanmar's Kachin State. But neither Kachin, nor other ethnic groups engaged in its trade rever jadeite to the extent that Han Chinese do. The main historical use of jadeite for Kachin seems to have been as a trade object, and I met few Kachin people wearing jade jewellery. The female ceremonial dress of some Kachin and Jingpo tribes is ornamented with silver coins, and some women wear amber jewellery. Many Bamar and Shan/Dai wear gold jewellery, while few wear jade. Meanwhile, a Muslim Rohingya jade trader said Rohingya rarely wear jewellery for religious reasons.

Though incomparable to Chinese markets, jade finds some niche markets among Westerners. A Swedish gemmologist I talked to categorised her fellow gemmology students in London into 'natural science nerds' interested in the physical composition of gemstones and 'New Age hippie-types', who believe in their 'magical' properties. To this we should add future gem traders.[9] I participated in a jade workshop organised by the American owner of a jewellery shop in Chiang Mai. Seven of the other nine participants were middle-aged Western women, who seemed to fit the gemmologist's description of the 'New Age hippie-type', expressing an attraction to gemstones that was more spiritual than gemmological or economic. The shop owner had hired a young Chinese-Burmese woman, whose family leased government-controlled mines in the Kachin State and supplied the shop owner with feicui, to do a presentation. The presentation was a kind of shopping guide, which taught us how to distinguish nephrite and jadeite, genuine and counterfeit jade, and different types and grades of jade. It also mentioned 'benefits of jade', including the following: "In fengshui, jade has been used for centuries for its abilities to create a feeling of harmony and balance […] protection and good luck […] creating wealth [and] attracting more friends". After the presentation, several participants bought jade

[9] Institutions like the Gemmological Association of Great Britain and the Gemological Institute of America offer workshops, courses and programmes of various lengths, topics, and specialisations.

jewellery. The shop owner acted as a matchmaker between buyers and jades, suggesting particular jades to fit the buyers' skin tone, style, and personality.

Other gemstone shops I visited in northern Thailand offered English-language promotional materials that correlated benefits of jade to astrology, proposing that jade is particularly efficacious in certain years and months, and that people born in particular zodiac positions benefit especially from jade. Some listed benefits were: Jade stimulates happiness, harmony in family and work, material abundance, a relaxed mind, nourishment and health, helps removing toxins from the body, wards off harmful spirits, and clears negative thoughts. Similar meanings abound in New Age websites. 'Galacticconnection.com' featured jade as the Stone of the Month for October 2012 for 'vibrational support'. The site reads: "We are experiencing record highs with the Sun's CMEs and light particles blasting our planet […] If you feel like you are affected by these energies and need calming [jade] is the stone for you!" Here, jade is promoted as "soothing for the nervous system", it "opens up all of our heart chakras to Divine love", heals pain in the lower back or kidneys, lungs and the nervous system, strengthens the immune system, promotes health in the organs that purify blood, and supports the hips, spleen, and hair.[10] Another New Age website suggests using jade in meditation or sleep, where jade is to be placed over the 'heart chakra' or on the forehead 'just above the Third Eye or brow chakra' to promote physical and emotional wellbeing.[11]

Such Western New Age beliefs in healing and protective functions of jade employ vocabularies from different intellectual traditions - including the Hindu concept of 'chakra', Chinese Fengshui ideas about harmony, and Western Naturalist ideas about particles and the immune system - into a syncretistic Orientalist philosophy. The denigration of the 'New Age hippie-types', as voiced by hardened expats in Chiang Mai, is perhaps because their beliefs express conscious choices more so than habitus. Unlike people in Ruili, who have grown up with jade, the hippies seem like postmodern consumers in a global cultural supermarket, who eclectically pick elements of belief systems as part of self-conscious lifestyle, and identity projects. Also, the very rationality of 'believing' seems distinct among Chinese and Western informants. A Chinese gemstone trader I interviewed said:

> I believe in jade 50 per cent. My body feels better and I have good dreams when I sleep with jade. I cannot prove it 100 per cent, so I believe in it 50 per cent. If I believe 100

[10] http://galacticconnection.com/articles/jade-is-the-stone-of-the-month-for-october-2012-2/
[11] http://thehealingchest.com/crystals-stones/jade-meaning/

> per cent, it's like I jump into a well, I cannot see the world outside it. 50 per cent means I will keep getting information, and maybe I will change my mind one day. My mother's relative can see ghosts. Many people have that kind of eyes. I'm not sure about it, so I also believe in it 50 per cent.

I find this rationalisation quite characteristic of a pragmatic and flexible Chinese mind-set, influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, which does not take mutual exclusion as its ontological foundation. Whether inclined towards naturalism or New Age spiritualism, many Westerners can probably not prove assumptions we take for granted – that the earth orbits the sun, that jade helps purify human blood – but we seem more inclined than Chinese to posit our beliefs as either//or: *Either* we believe the earth orbits the sun or that jade helps purify our blood, *or* we do not believe it at all.

## Materialism and Idealism

A range of oppositions can be derived from uses and conceptions of jade described so far. Jade is material and conceptual, actual and ideal, natural and cultural, dead matter and animated agent. One way to approach this spectrum is via a tension between a materialism that posits material matter as the fundamental substance of reality and an idealism that sees external reality as a product of consciousness.

A friend in Ruili said that in China materialism (*weiwuzhuyi*) can connote Marxism, whereas idealism (*weixinzhuyi*) is often related to spiritualism (*jingshen*). Chinese communists associated spiritualism with capitalism, and from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping, anti-spiritualism has guided attacks on practices thought to challenge the power and orthodoxy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), ranging from conspicuous consumption to religion and 'superstition' (*mixin*). As a luxury good, jade has been associated with bourgeois decadence under Mao and corruption of officials under Xi Jinping, but has also, as noted, been elevated to a national symbol in the post-Mao era. Dutton (1998: 238-272) similarly noted a tension in the transformation of Mao paraphernalia like coins, badges, and posters from inalienable gifts redistributed through the socialist work units and conveying socialist messages to alienable commodities sold in private markets in the post-Mao era, whereby Mao is transformed from national father to fetishized kitsch, promoting "the very new idea of

everything being for sale" (ibid: 241).[12] In both cases, materials signified by the Party to communicate 'idealist' messages can be suspicious in the hands of ordinary people.

Georges Bataille (1985: 15) suggested: "Most materialists, even though they may have wanted to do away with all spiritual entitites, ended up positing an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it as specifically idealist".[13] While the fetish can manifest Marxist suspicions against idealism, the CCP and its leader has elevated itself to attain spiritual, idealist, or indeed fetishized qualities. In the post-Mao era, the legitimacy of the CCP rests upon a tacit social contract that it delivers economic prosperity, while maintaining an ideological control, which is communicated partly with Marxist rhetoric (Hjellum 1996). This ambiguous context has fostered what Kleinman *et. al.* (2011: 24) call hypermaterialism, hyperindividualism, and cynicism. This type of cynicism can be seen as arising in an orthodox state, where citizens experience "official ideological representation of social reality as largely false and at the same time as immutable and omnipresent" (Yurchak 1997: 162). Hyperindividualism marks a shift of moral responsibilities from the state to a new enterprising and desiring self (Kleinman *et. al.*: 15, 24-25; Rofel 2007), while hypermaterialism can denote fetishism, or how, in Bataille's (1985: 15) words, 'dead matter' becomes 'ideal matter'.

My friend in Ruili linked the binary of materialism//spiritualism to that of 'fullness' (*shi*) and 'emptiness' (*xu*). She said that the CCP by fighting spiritualism in the Mao-era and embracing capitalism in the post-Mao era has made China too full/material at the expense of an emptiness/spiritualism that she values higher. In both Taoist and Buddhist thought, emptiness can designate an ideal for people to align with to be in sync with the 'natural' course of things. Conversely, in Buddhism, the 'fullness' of the material world can be considered transitory and illusory. 'Emptiness' can thus characterise a spiritual space of genuineness in structural opposition to a material, political world characterised by falseness. My Chinese friends said China is a big country, and it is therefore futile for one person to try to change anything. It is best to go with the flow. In contemporary China, 'outwards'

[12] Svetlana Boym (1994: 228) describes a similar transformation in the early 1990s Moscow's Arbat street, where "Beheaded Communist leaders and other totalitarian antiques lie or stand next to cheap western gadgets and expensive Russian artefacts made for tourists consumption. Here, matreshka dolls, which depict communist leaders, Boym suggests, symbolizes the eclectic culture of the Gorbachev time, and "are comic artefacts with which adults play at politics and the new commercialism" (Ibid: 238).

[13] Against Hegelian idealism, Bataille (1985) proposes a materialism inspired by Gnosticism, where "Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and […] refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations" (ibid: 51).

cultivation and performance of guanxi functional in doing business may be considered 'going with the flow', whereas spiritual spaces of refuge and agency often direct 'inwards', whether this manifests in self-cultivation through jade carving, or disappearing into the emptiness of drug use.

Guanxi is mainly a masculine domain of tactical interactions, whereas jade symbolises an idealism and purity sometimes associated with feminine qualities. *Baoyu*, the boy who in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is born with a piece of jade in his mouth, is idealistic and pure, "effeminate, very sensitive, crying easily, and given to temper tantrums", he likes the company of girls, says girls are made of water and boys of mud, and thinks that once a girl is married, she will be polluted by the filthy influences of men (Kao 1980: 112-113). In the novel, jade represents an idealism associated with females, which is opposed to a pragmatic, material, masculine world of political and intellectual glory.

The tensions noted here between materialism/Marxism-/fullness/exteriority /masculinity on the one hand and idealism/spiritualism/-emptiness/interiority /femininity on the other beg the question of how conceptual oppositions are conceived of in Chinese thought. As I discuss in Chapter 8, the Taoist *yin-yang* binary posits opposing qualities as mutually constitutive, rather than mutually exclusive. In that chapter I suggest that gold has 'material' connotations as an economic valuable in China, while jade exudes 'spiritual' values underpinned by Confucian analogies between jade and human virtues. But as I demonstrate in Chapter 7, each 'thing', like jade, may host mutually constitutive oppositions in China. I propose to see such oppositions as potentials, and that their actualisation in different contexts may illuminate political, economic, social, and cultural developments in China.

## New Materialism and The Ontological Turn

Ascribed with labels like 'new materialism' and 'the ontological turn', recent theorising discusses how a privileging of human perspectives in Cartesian philosophical tradition has developed a range of dualisms - between nature and culture, nonhuman and human, materiality and conceptuality - while pointing to how such distinctions can be less clear-cut in some non-Western ontologies.[14] This

[14] Similar approaches in social science, philosophy, Science and Technology Studies and related disciplines have been promoted under labels like 'posthumanism', 'multispecies ethnography', and 'speculative realism' (see Holbraad and Pedersen 2017; Miccoli 2017; Sanzo 2018)

has opened up for a de-centring of 'anthropocentric' approaches, which recognises roles of nonhuman actors in guiding ontologies, and therefore also allows them to guide ethnographic foci, methodologies, and theorising. One implication is a focus on how multiple worlds are made through entanglements and interactions between humans and nonhumans, rather than assuming a single world to which humans ascribe differential meanings. Descola (2013a, 2013b) discusses culture//nature and human//nonhuman dualisms as manifesting a Western anthropocentric ontology of the Moderns, while pointing to how such dualisms are transcended in the worlds of other groups. Bennet (2010) examines how a 'vital materiality' runs through and across human and nonhuman bodies, while other scholars have reconceptualised human-nonhuman worlds by thinking through nonhumans like forests (Kohn 2013), mushrooms (Tsing 2015), insects (Raffles 2010), and stone (Cohen 2015).

In line with some of these discussions, we may distinguish between approaches to nonhumans, including jade, as emitting being and efficacy in- and by themselves, or as more passive generic resources for human meanings and interventions. The following quote from Chinese writer Xingjian Gao's novel *Soul Mountain* (2001: 61), in which a man journeys into southwest China's mountains, may illustrate the two approaches:

> This is pristine natural beauty. It is irrepressible, seeks no reward, and is without goal, a natural beauty derived neither from symbolism nor metaphor and needing neither analogies nor associations. This white azalea with the purity of snow and the lustre of jade keeps re-appearing […] here and there, among the slender cold fir trees, like the tireless hidden cuckoo which captivates ones soul and keeps leading one towards it.

Gao's valuing of a vibrant nature without intensions or goals reminds us of the jade company that specified qualities of jade via the Taoist virtue of 'non-doing', as symbolised by water, which does not "proclaim its importance [but] flows humbly to the lowest level, and in so doing it is much like Tao". The idea of values communicated by nonhuman phenomena brings to mind Jane Bennet's (2010: xii) emphasis on how "enchantment points […] toward the humans who *feel* enchanted [and] toward the agency of the things that *produce* […] effects in human and other bodies". Bennet focuses on "the capacity of things […] to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (ibid: xiii). Exploring efficacies of agents like trash, electricity, food, metal, stem cells, and worms, Bennet articulates a monism based on the idea that "everything is made of the same substance" and that "there remains a natural *tendency* to the way things are" (ibid: x,

xi). Such a monism does not seem essentially different from Taoist ideas that complementary principles and forces underpin, manifest in, and engender phenomena, human and nonhuman. Like Alfred Gell's (1998) concept of the 'secondary agency' of art objects, Bennet's concept of 'thing-power' points to distributed, non-intentional agency of objects, and her approach is considered part of a 'new materialism' that turns away from anthropocentric dualisms of linguistic and social constructivist paradigms (Sanzo 2018).

Gao first evokes a natural beauty that is definable without making comparisons, whether in the form of symbolism, metaphor, analogy, or association. But then he compares the purity of a white azalea to that of snow, its lustre to that of jade, and its soul-captivating appearance to the cuckoo. In doing so, he disrupts the self-defining existence of the azalea by linking it metaphorically to properties of snow, jade, and the cuckoo. This, off course, is what language does. In order to describe and define phenomena, we place them within linguistic systems of relational meaning, which in Saussure's (2011 [1959]) terminology function as signifiers to the signified. We might thus distinguish between the two types of human orientations towards the nonhuman as 'non-linguistic' and 'linguistic', respectively.

A non-linguistic approach could focus on how meaning, value and, by implication, culture *emerges from* nonhuman phenomena like feicui, similar to how Demattè (2006: 208) supported claims for a Chinese 'Jade Age' due to the influence of nephrite jade in engendering economic and ideological changes in Chinese middle-to-late Neolithic contexts. Martin Holbraad (2007) argues that the anthropological task of understanding the divinatory power of a certain powder called *ache*, which is used in Cuban séances, is to come to know a particular materialised concept of 'powder-power'. Claims that *ache*-powder is power for Cuban diviners "create new objects (e.g. powerful powder) in the very act of enunciating new concepts (e.g. powerful powder)" (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastells 2007: 13). Thus, "the enunciation of a concept of powder with which we are quite unfamiliar […] is the enunciation of an unfamiliar 'powder-concept', where the hyphen serves to emphasise that the possibility for such an enunciation depends on collapsing the distinction between the concept of powder and powder 'itself'" (ibid: 14). Contrary to a linguistic paradigm, this approach merges material things and human concepts. In line with Holbraad's discussion, we could argue that if we do not value jadeite like many Chinese do, it is because we do not yet know the material-concept that they know as feicui, including its qualities of material and spiritual 'purity'. As Holbraad and Pedersen (2017: 6) write in their exposition of the recent 'ontological turn' in anthropology, which

proposes to take things and concepts encountered in fieldwork seriously on their own terms by letting them guide theorising: "The ontological turn is not so much a matter of 'seeing things differently' […] It is above all a matter of seeing different things". Like 'new materialism', 'the ontological turn' reacts against an anthropocentric privileging of epistemological considerations that has blocked a view on efficacies of 'local' objects and their potentials for theorising.

Just as Cuban divinatory *ache*-powder is different from other types of powders with which we are familiar – also when their chemical composition is identical - feicui in China is chemically identical to, but potentially ontologically different from jadeite as constituted by gemmological science. Studying how Chinese carvers, traders, and consumers engage with feicui may thus afford different theorising than studying jadeite as an isolated object under a microscope. Jinghong Zhang (2014) offers an instructive example of how studying a 'Chinese material' allows Chinese concepts to emerge and guide theorising. Zhang employs the concept of *jianghu* (literally 'rivers and lakes'), which signifies a combative nonmainstream arena of itinerant knight-errands opposing orders of officialdom, to discuss how different Chinese actors negotiate the authenticity and value of Yunnanese Puer tea, defying standardised definitions, while emphasising personalised knowledge. It's connotations of a nongovernmental space echoes James Scott's (2009) discussion of 'Zomia' as a mountainous region where people sought refuge from the state (Zhang 2014: 24). Puer tea and feicui share highly singular materialities and multiple valuation parameters, which in both cases necessitate cultivation of personalised knowledge for traders, which grinds against attempts at imposing standardised categories, valuation parameters and trade practices from above. Categories, valuation parameters, and trade practices for feicui are not random manifestations of human creativity, but partly derive from tactile, material, chemical, visible and invisible properties of feicui itself. As I discuss in Chapter 8, the materiality of feicui affords different labelling, valuation, and trade practices than, for example, gold.

A 'linguistic' approach would conversely focus on how meaning and value is *attached to* feicui, as it is interpreted within linguistic-cultural systems. Here, things do not emit meaning, value, and agency in, and by themselves. As Appadurai (1986: 5) argued, "things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with". Linguistic-hermeneutical approaches have been influential in discussions about globalisation, material culture, and consumption from the 1980s to the early 2000s, which point to diversifying processes of localisation in indigenous interpretations and appropriations of global

and regional cultural flows (see, for example, Inda and Rosaldo 2008; Sahlins 1985, 1994, 1999).[15] While some 'non-linguistic' approaches tend to focus on ontological potentials of particular things among particular groups, an important heritage of such 'linguistic' approaches is their opening up for methodological attention to effects of the circulation of things across localities and groups of people.

Considering these two approaches to relations between material things and human meanings, I seek to convey feicui as a Chinese material-concept that is at once 'non-linguistic' in its materiality and 'linguistic' in its conceptuality. Existing independently of humans, feicui influences human conceptions, but is made valuable and meaningful through language, culture, and interaction.

## Jade as Heuristic: A Non-Linguistic Approach

Which concepts we 'see' is dependent upon choices, interests, interactions, and interpretations of ethnographer and informants, but also, I maintain, upon properties and potentials of forms that carry or stimulate such concepts. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007: 5) argue that "the difference between an analytic and a heuristic use of the term 'things' is that while the former implies a classificatory repertoire intended for refinement and expansion, the latter serves to carve out things […] as the field from which such repertoires might emerge". Using 'things-as-heuristic' here implies engaging with things as 'conduits for concept production'. Similarly, I propose that examining how people engage with feicui may allow concepts to come into view and guide ethnographic theorising.

When we first met in Ruili, the jade trader Mr Huang suggested that I should start my research by examining a wide variety of feicui stones. Secondly, I should talk to carvers to learn how the stone is transformed into jewellery and figurines. Only then could I learn about the role of jade in Chinese culture, he said. Mr Huang's advice was congruent with my methodological premise of letting fieldwork evolve around jade. Janet Lee Scott (2007) studied the Chinese tradition of ritual paper offerings, which comprise a plethora of objects made of paper, which are offered to gods, ghosts, and ancestors residing beyond the world of the living, and which are burned as a "vital component of both public and private worship" (ibid: 2). Based on

[15] It is worth nothing that 'global' flows in these discussions are often equated with 'Western' influences. Given the massive impact of a current China-centered globalisation, a growing scholarly interest in local effects of China's BRI is timely.

fieldwork in Hong Kong among paper masters who craft the offerings, shopkeepers who sell them, and ordinary people who burn them, Scott's study progressed 'from the object outward' (ibid: 6). I employed a similar approach of working 'outward' from jade. My gradual appreciation of the material complexity and diversity of feicui also allowed me to diversify Ruili's jade markets. For example, some carvers specialised in big stones, some in small ones, some in high-grade feicui, some in low-grade, 'residue' or 'byproduct' feicui. Some traders had access to particular mines, some specialised in 'betting stones' sold from shops, others in jewellery sold via mobile phones, and so on. Interviews with carvers, traders and consumers support my discussion of valuations and conceptions of feicui in Chapter 7 and 8. My next step was to 'follow' trajectories of feicui to be able to describe policies, politics, organisations, routes, networks, interactions, and practices sustaining the trade (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6).

*The Social Life of Things*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (1986), focused research on the trajectories of things, and how their statuses change – for example, from inalienable gift to alienable commodity – as they circulate through spatio-temporal contexts. Appadurai suggested we have to follow the things themselves, as their meanings are inscribed in "their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (ibid: 5). The anthology was written at a time when hermeneutical approaches posited objects as passive generic units for signification and interpretation within historically and culturally situated 'grammars'. While meanings crystallise in particular histories and cultures, I also focus on how conceptualisations can derive from properties of things themselves, emphasizing *performance* over *representation* (Pickering 2017). I employ this 'non-linguistic' approach to examine how feicui and other material forms in my fieldsites – including printed advertising material, mobile phones, cigarettes, alcohol, tea, and fighting cocks – allow for concepts to be 'seen', and how they can mediate human social life.

## Technologies of the Imagination

In the introduction to the anthology *Thinking through Things*, Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007) turn attention "to the relationship between concepts and things in a way that questions whether these ought necessarily be considered as distinct in the first place", suggesting that this distinction is peculiar to Euro-American philosophical traditions (ibid: 2). Their aim is to take 'things' encountered in the field "as they present themselves, rather than immediately assuming that they signify, represent, or

stand for something else" (ibid.). The authors see a 'quiet revolution' in anthropology, which has shifted focus from epistemology towards ontology - from questions of how phenomena may be illuminated, to how the phenomena may themselves offer illumination (ibid: 7).

Chinese language and culture is saturated with symbolism, and certain jade carving forms symbolise concepts like longevity, safety, and luck. Efficacies of concepts may be seen as actualisation of the virtual (Ishii 2012), and while these concepts may exist irrespective of jade, they are also actualised through the carved jade forms. The materiality of jade delineates possible forms and sizes of carvings. I visited the Buddhist temples Wat Ou Sai Kham in Chiang Mai and Wat Dhammamongkol in Bangkok, which both host large jade Buddha sculptures. The jade stones used for carving the Buddhas had been blessed by Buddhist monks, who thereby charged them with efficacies for believers touching, and praying in front of them. Internal cracks can make it impossible to carve a large Buddha statue of a jade stone, and thereby restrict its efficacy in human lives.

Temple shops sold small Buddha figurines carved of residue jade from the large Buddhas and used as talismans. Appearing as fractal iterations of the large jade stones, the carved residue jade was also charged with efficacy from the monks' blessings, similarity thereby spanning scales. But a Thai friend said efficacy is greater in large jade Buddhas, thus correlating efficacy of blessings to size of carved material. Money from jade talismans sold in temple shops is injected into sustenance of the temple and its monks, pointing to how what Bloch and Parry (1989) call a capitalist 'cycle of short-term exchanges' sustains a more transcendent moral-cosmological order, here through jade. Similar to graded efficacies of large and small jade Buddhas in Thailand, the efficacy of the carving form in China is lower in non-jade materials like wood or granite. Furthermore, the degree of, for example, safety that a 'safety disk' (*pingan kou*) feicui carving can transmit to humans is contingent upon the graded quality of the feicui material used. While concepts may be attached to things, particular materialities thus possess an effectuating force in delineating conditions of efficacy of these concepts.

**6.** Jade Buddas at the Ou Sai Kham temple in Chiang Mai. Photo by the author.

Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen's (2009) discussion of 'technologies of the imagination' is instructive in considering how feicui may engender conceptualisations. The authors first criticize a tendency to substitute culture with imagination, for example in Charles Taylor's (2002) concept of the 'social imaginary' as an overarching template for thought and action. Secondly, they criticize a tendency towards instrumentalism that casts imagination as something purposeful, in effect "to make sense of the world" (p. 8). They see an antidote to such holistic approaches in Benedict Anderson's (1983) argument that nations emerged imaginatively as a result of practices like diffusion of maps and the printed press. Rather than positing the imagination as a source of 'meaning', Anderson (p. 6) argued that communities are to be distinguished by the *style* in which they are imagined. Thirdly, they criticise a romantic tendency to ascribe positive connotations to the imagination, which they suggest might be a "quintessentially European ideological […] construct" (ibid: 10).

The authors see in Kant's view of the imagination as "the ability to bring to mind that which is not entirely present to the senses" an implicit positing of the imagination "as a process rather than a distinct field" (ibid: 11-12). As for the term 'technologies', the authors refer to "the diverse […] styles through which imaginative

effects are engendered" (ibid: 16). The authors proceed to argue that imaginative effects that 'technologies' bring about are *indeterminate* (ibid: 18-19). To get around this apparent paradox, they employ Ingold's (1997: 119) concept of 'exaptation', which signifies how "structures that may have evolved for one purpose are co-opted for quite different functions". The authors see in this concept an intermediate mode between 'determinism' and 'possibilism', but emphasise the latter. They further use Gibson's (1979) term of 'affordances' of artefacts to argue: "Technologies 'afford' imaginings in ways that, though hardly random, are nevertheless essentially unpredictable and quite often unintended" (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen: 21, 22).

But as the authors (p. 23) ask: If any given technology can afford a variety of imaginative effects, then how can we explain the use of a particular kind of technology as the prevalent one for engendering such imaginative effects? Conversely, we could also ask why certain imaginative effects become prevalent. While the authors argue that some technologies "are particularly good at opening up spaces in which the underdetermined outcomes that we call imagination emerge" (p. 25), they do not provide an unambiguous answer to neither question. I believe this reflects their quite stringent rejection of the imagination as an existing schema of meanings and their stronger focus on generic imaginative potentials of 'things' than on inherent properties of particular things. In the case of jade, I find it counterintuitive to reject a crystallisation of meanings throughout thousands of years of use in China as underpinning current symbolism enshrouding the material. Furthermore, I suggest that a deeper focus on inherent properties of things could help answering why particular things become prevalent in affording imaginative effects that are not random, nor unlimited.

I am thus less inclined than Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen towards the 'incidental' end of a continuum that hosts 'possibilism' and 'determinism' at its two extreme ends. First, in Chapter 8, I posit Confucian analogies between jade and concepts like purity, as well as conceptions of jade as hosting mutually constitutive forces like the Taoist *yin-yang* binary, as cultural resources underpinning contemporary demand for the material. Further, in Chapter 7, I spell out a vernacular Chinese nomenclature for properties of feicui – in effect a 'language' - that establishes meanings and values through analogising. Secondly, arguing in Chapter 8 that the opaque layer of 'skin', which covers the 'meat' of feicui stones, actualises a notion of indeterminacy with resonance in Taoist philosophy, I show how particular properties of feicui engender particular imaginative effects. I thus posit feicui as both actualising and engendering particular 'Chinese' concepts and conceptualisations.

In the Chinese tradition of burning paper offerings, materiality matters in affording human imaginations of, and transactions with gods, ghosts, and ancestors in the next world. The shapes of the offerings vary greatly; from paper gold and silver ingots and 'Bank of Hell' notes, to paper replicas of credit cards, toothpaste, foodstuffs, cigarettes, furniture, Louis Vuitton bags, cars, and houses that ancestors may need in the next world. As consumer goods and money shift in the mundane world, paper replicas of them for use in the next world do so too. This iteration of mundane money and valuables in the next world point to a Chinese monist ontology, in which human and nonhuman domains work according to similar principles, rather than being of a different and mutually exclusive nature, as proponents of a naturalist ontology might assume. In a discussion of Chinese divination, Matthews (2017) argues that the cosmology of *Yi Jing* (the 'Book of Changes') assumes a monist ontology characterized by continuity of physicality and interiority on a cosmic scale, which assumes that resemblances between phenomena are based on shared intrinsic characteristics. Mathews labels this ontology 'homologism', and places it as a structural counterpoint to analogism, where it replaces totemism in Descola's (2013b) system of four modes of ontological identification.

But while Chinese paper offerings are 'real things' for the living, they are only tentative replicas "in a state of becoming", and "it is *burning* which transforms them into real objects at their destination in other worlds" (Scott 2007: 20; emphasis added). In other words, the potentiality of mundane paper money in the next world is actualised through a conversion, which is achieved through the 'vital transformation' of burning (ibid.). The efficacy of 'spirit money' is thus predicated upon its materiality. Similar to role of incense for Chinese spirit mediums (Bunkenborg 2015), it is the 'ephemeral', 'burnable', and 'disappearing' property of paper money that facilitates communication and transactions between this world and the next. People burn paper money to *gods* to give thanks and blessings or to ask for assistance; to *ghosts* to ease the sufferings of these unknown and neglected dead, (who may have died violently or far from home); and to *ancestors* to provide them comforts of the living: "People believe that the ancestors will wear the paper clothing and accessories, live in the paper house and garden, drive in the paper car, use the paper appliances, and spend the paper money, just as they would in this world" (Scott: 21).

Paper money burned for ancestors is geneally seen as payments of *debt*, based on an idea that people are born into this world by borrowing money from the bank of the underworld, and at death are required to repay the loan contracted at birth (ibid: 26). Burning of paper money also assists the soul's expenses during the forty-nine days it is

believed necessary to traverse Hell, while the ultimate goal is to free the souls of the deceased from rebirth and gain eternal life (ibid: 26, 27). We might further see obligations of the living towards the dead in terms of filial piety (*xiao*): "Children are indebted to their parents for the gift of birth and for raising them, and must repay them not only through support in old age, but through death ritual and ancestral worship" (Oxfeld: 2010: 47). Having a 'cultivated heart/mind' (*xiuxin*) can point to remembering and accepting one's ritual obligations (ibid: 61-62). David Graeber (2011) argues that money did not appear as practical solutions in markets, but rather as debt to the state, and before that to gods and religious institutions, which produced notions like 'guilt', 'sin' and 'redemption'. We may see the Chinese tradition of burning paper money in this world to repay ancestors' debts in the underworld as actualising a notion of debt - or more widely reciprocity (*bao*) - as a fundamental principle of relationships that cuts through life and death.

Discussing the practice in Taiwan, Hill Gates (1987) argues that paper money offerings present a *homology* between this world and the next world, based upon a worldview drawn from a deep-rooted experience of petty capitalism seen in opposition to the state. Paying off one's debt is an essential obligation on earth, which becomes elevated through ritual to a kind of sacrament in heaven, where paper money repays the debt incurred when the soul gains a new body and fate in rebirth. In Gates' analysis, the fact that petty capitalism has always been constrained by political forces in Chinese society gives the custom a counterhegemonic aspect. The custom implies that the market should govern transactions of all sorts; that money should enable people to achieve their goals directly through the market without the intervention of political power; and that capitalist relations should be at the heart of the transactions between 'people' and 'gods' – between common persons and authorities.

The tradition involves both 'disappearances' and 'visibilities'. Writing about Wenzhou, Mayfair Yang (2008) notes a link between the resurgence of 'ritual economy' in the context of the reform-era economy and a tradition of petty capitalism, where the market economy was embedded in institutions like family, lineage organisations, temple associations, Taoist and Buddhist institutions, and community ethics (ibid: 233). As families got wealthier, they competed to build the biggest and costliest ancestor hall, or put on the most impressive sacrificial ritual (ibid: 231). Wealth generated from commerce is diverted into 'non-productive uses' that "increase one's merit accumulation" or into "investments in the divine world" (ibid.). Yang sees such conversions of wealth as an indigenous response to the potentially socially destructive profit-motive of capitalism and a bolstering of local

identities eroded by nationalism in the 20th Century. Drawing on Bataille's discussion of the symbolic destruction of wealth, Yang (2000) elsewhere describes China's resurging ritual economy in opposition to an ideology of accumulation in the market economy. The *disappearance* of paper money and incense through burning is often performed in social contexts that – like the potlatch – *visualises* 'non-productive' ritual expenditure.

Jule Chu (2010b) discusses how US Dollar remittances from overseas Fuzhounese hace a higher status in local ritual economies than the Chinese *Yuan*, which is associated with corrupt government officials. Discussing death commemoration in Vietnam, Heonik Kwon (2007) notes a distinction between offerings of paper-made gold money and replicas of the Vietnamese currency *Dong* for gods and ancestors on the one hand, and replica US Dollar bills for displaced, grievous ghosts of 'the American war', on the other. Here, different currencies carry different moral connotations and afford imaginations of, and relations to different human and nonhuman agents.

These discussions by and large posit ritual economy as a moral practice for participants. Meanwhile, Blake (2011) discusses how paper money offerings for ancestors are lampooned in print media in Shanghai as 'superstitious' (*mixin*), excessive, insincere, and self-contradictory. Protagonists in these media stories barely mention "the frightful images of purgatory made popular by Buddhist and Taoist liturgies" (ibid: 465). Rather, they "posit eternity as more of the same […] tantamount to the living world looking at the reversed image of itself in a mirror of endless regress and return […] but with the singular possibility of augmenting the sense of "sameness" with the things that money can buy […] In this way, the living supply their deceased family, friends, and indeed their own eternities with a largess, and overflowing treasury, a cornucopia of goods that signifies an eternal life of diversion, leisure and comfort" (ibid: 465-465). Critical voices may thus denigrate those who burn paper money as projecting worldly desires and excesses onto the next world more so than performing moral duties of filial piety.

If paper money actualizes notions of cosmic debt, reciprocity, filial piety, and local identity (encompassed by petty capitalist ethics in Gates' analysis) through conversions facilitated by its burnable, disappearing property, the durable solidity of feicui affords a temporal perspective on a nonhuman world that exceeds the human lifespan. Some emphasise that feicui can be more than 100 million years old and that engaging with it makes them feel small and ephemeral as humans. Jade can also concretise reciprocities between living people and their ancestors in China. But while

ritual paper money is 'special-purpose' for use in the next world, jade also hosts a wide spectrum of uses in the mundane world that derive from its visual and material characteristics. Different imaginations afforded by paper and jade could at least partly be ascribed to their different materialities.

I collected printed promotional materials for feicui, which are given to visitors in large jade shops, and feature images of feicui attached with poetic descriptions and philosophical ideas relating both to the material and its carving form. Marcus Banks (2013: 403) suggests that visual material is a copy of reality - an icon more than a symbol, but still a representation. But while content, and semiotic analyses are the most formal approaches to visual analysis, visual materials also have *effects* in human worlds. As Prior (2003: 5) argues about documents: "things, such as documents and the information they contain, can influence and structure human agents every bit as effectively as the agents influence the things". One effect noted by Banks is that visual materials allow people to 'see' things that can otherwise not be seen, or which are not present (ibid: 404, 405), which resonates with Kant's view of the imagination as "the ability to bring to mind that which is not entirely present to the senses". With Gell's (1998) discussion of art works as 'secondary agents' that exercise 'distributed agency' of their makers, we may see feicui advertising material as commercial 'technologies of the imagination' that stimulate consumption by distributing categorisations of types, authenticities, meanings, and efficacies of jades and carving forms from jade companies to buyers.

## Domains, Flows, and Substances

In line with Appadurai's call for following things as they circulate through different contexts, I initially had an ambition of following jade from the mines in Myanmar's Kachin State, via nodes on the Chinese side of the border, where the stones are cut, carved, and polished, to their destination as jewellery worn by women in eastern Chinese metropolises like Shanghai. This approach would ideally illuminate meanings and values manifested and engendered by jade in nodes of production, exchange and consumption. Tina Harris (2013), who initially planned to follow a particular commodity, such as a Tibetan wool carpet, found this ambition to be both "embarrassingly romantic and methodological impractical" (ibid: 24). My initial ambition likewise proved impractical and somewhat naïve. After all, I could not just glue myself to a jade boulder in the Kachin hills, and wait for someone to pick us up and send us off on our journey.

Inquiring about the origins of commodities in the marketplaces of Kalimpong and Lhasa, Harris discovered that "each had such a dense web of far-flung networks of people involved in its production, transport, exchange, and consumption that it was nearly impossible to even begin such a project, partly because of limits in time and funding" (ibid.). There are dozens of mines in the Kachin State, leased and mined by various groups; dozens of sites in the Kachin-Yunnan borderlands, where jade is processed and traded; and potentially as many destinations for jade jewellery as end-users. Even if I managed to follow one particular stone, how representative would its journey be of the trajectories of the perhaps thousands of stones traveling throughout the region daily? Harris found even more limiting "the restrictions and obstacles – for instance, passport laws, roads that were washed out, and permits needed – that prevented nearly anybody (nomads or anthropologists) from actually being able to "follow a thing" from beginning to end" (ibid.). Practical issues also prevented my access to the jade mines. Different military groups guard the jade mines, there are several Burmese military checkpoints on the road leading there from Myitkina, and visiting the area requires a government permit.

Despite these limitations, I do not consider 'following' feicui an invalid method, and most studies are approximations based on research in 'representative' nodes in a commodity chain, rather than an actual journey with a thing. A wealth of historical and ethnographic studies has examined circulations of things. While a comprehensive review is out of scope, some examples will highlight how following a thing allows for domains – ranging from policies, laws, and legality; markets, actors, networks, and exchange forms; to meanings, values, conceptualisations, and even lack of knowledge - to 'be seen'. Such domains are often dissimilar in different nodes of commodity chains, and following things through such nodes may visualise domains, their contents, and interrelations through comparison.

The anthology *Chinese Circulations*, edited by Tagliacozzo and Chang (2011), examines contacts, transactions, and transmissions between China and Southeast Asia over what historian Fernand Braudel called the *longue durée*. Building upon the approaches of Appadurai and Kopytoff in *The Social Life of Things*, commodities are central in the volume, and several of its authors adopt a commodity chain analysis. Both Wen-Chin Chang's and Laichen Sun's chapters focus on feicui. Based on interviews, Chang examines legal and illegal jade networks among migrant Yunnanese Chinese in Thailand and Burma during Burma's socialist period (1962-1998), these peoples' interaction with state agents and other ethnic communities, mining and trading regulations, as well as capital flows in the region, highlighting "the unofficial

connections interacting with and reacting against the state bureaucracy" (Chang 2011: 460). Meanwhile, Sun employs historical sources in identifying the spread of Burmese jadeite to China and the Chinese application of the term feicui to it, arguing that China was and still is the driving force behind the whole gem business in Myanmar (Sun 2011: 204). The historical involvement by ethnic Chinese in the regional feicui trade, as documented by Chang and Sun, has but intensified until today (see Chapter 3).

Examining the underworld trade of gemstones, economist Thomas Naylor (2010) reconstructs the travel of a fictive gemstone "from the depths of the earth to the heights of fashion", emphasizing illegal activities surrounding this journey; from illegal mining, slavery, smuggling, tax exemption, and drug money laundering to counterfeiting (ibid: 133-134). Unravelling the social life of things can concretise tensions between laws, policies, and moral denigration on the one hand, and practices and moral legitimisations of involved actors on the other. Annette Hübschle (2016) followed flows of rhino horn from southern Africa to illegal markets in Southeast Asia through multi-sited participant observation, interviews and focus groups. Hübschle discusses how contestation of the state-sponsored label of illegality serves as a legitimising and enabling mechanism for market actors, and points to fluid interfaces between legal, illegal and grey markets. I likewise encountered graduated categories of illegality and various moral legitimizations among Chinese vendors of counterfeit Western fashion products in in Shanghai. These explanations addressed a positive conception of copying in China, livelihood, and economic unfairness of a globalising system of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) that originates in Western moral conceptions of creation (Møller 2010: 130-133). Following things can thus highlight constructed and contested character of what qualifies as legal and moral.

Following things may also illuminate stratified access and profitability in different nodes of a commodity chain. In Gereffi and Korzeniewitcz' (1994: 2) definition, commodity chains are composed of networks of actors "clustered around one commodity" and are "situationally specific, socially constructed, and locally integrated, underscoring the social embeddedness of economic organisation" (cited in He 2010: 29). Commodity chains are "not only regulated by economic rationality, but are both constrained and enabled by a vast array of social relations and culture", and by government policy and international regulations (He 2010: 29). Jun He performs a commodity chain analysis of matsutake mushrooms, picked in Tibetan villages in China's Yunnan Province and sold in Japan, and identifies profit differentiation between four groups at different levels in the commodity chain.

Commodity chain analysis has been used "to identify potential opportunities and imbalances in contemporary capitalism" (ibid.), and Jun He argues "the legislation regulating exports [of matsutake] constraints, rather than promotes equitable distribution of benefits" (ibid: 36). While a traditional 'code of conduct' regulates access to harvesting in the Tibetan villages, export licenses and permits, customs declarations and a quota system structure market access at the most lucrative level in the matsutake commodity chain. These policy factors "enhance access for some large-scale traders and export enterprises, but work against independent traders without permits or contacts in the Japanese market" (ibid: 34). In a commodity chain analysis of cardamom cultivated by ethnic Hmong in highland Vietnam, Tugault-Lafleur and Turner (2009) likewise point to mechanisms of access reliant on ethnic relations and different forms of capital that sustain economic advantages for certain actors. In the feicui commodity chain, top-level traders often have higher access to investment capital, political leverage, mining concessions, carvers, and consumers, but also emphasise luck, destiny, and knowledge about feicui as forces guiding economic profits (see Chapter 3, 4 and 8).

Following the social life of a thing can also point to different exchange forms and logics. Ssorin-Chaikov (2000) discusses how the social life of a bearskin reveals a multiplicity and ambiguity of transaction meanings in Katonga, a Siberian collective farm, which in the early 1990s appeared as a 'demonetised space'. An ethnic Evenki employee in Katonga shot a bear, and gifted the bear skin to Andrei, the head of the brigade, who gifted it to Tursunbai, the collective farm deputy director for hunting. Andrei's wife later re-negotiated goods in exchange for the bearskin, including macaroni, tea, cigarettes, milk, vodka, bullets and a tent. Next year, Tursunbai sold the bearskin in Kazakhstan.

The first gift by the hunter to Andrei had a reference of a traditional Evenki 'gift to a non-relative'. But it was also a gift from one of the poorest Evenki in the camp to one of the richest, who killed reindeer from his herd to help camp companions subsist, and there was a sense of indebtedness on the part of 'hunters' towards 'herders' in collective-farm reindeer brigades. The first gift thus occurred within an atmosphere of indebtedness and carried connotations of tribute (ibid: 352). In the collective farm, relationships between Andrei and Tursunbai were 'tributary' in the Soviet sense of a 'redistributive' planned economy. Tursunbai administered Andrei's fur-hunting plan, provided him with a hunting license and equipment and acquired fur from him after the hunting season. Outside this context, their more equal 'friendship' facilitated a shadow barter trade. When Andrei's wife remade the deal, the

gift was remade back to barter, and also carried a connotation of counter-gift on behalf of Tursunbai. A year later, the price of the bearskin was re-evaluated, and the 'gain' was counted as 'credit' to Andrei for supplies from Tursunbai's store for the upcoming hunting season. Taking credit for supplies, a hunter promises to return to the trader with fur. There is thus an ambiguity of trade and friendship. While Tursunbai earned money from reselling furs, money was absent in his transaction with Andrei and his wife. The value of goods like vodka was expressed in monetary terms, but the annual balance of debt and credit was never calculated precisely, and in Ssorin-Chaikov's analysis this lack of precise calculation suggests that Tursunbai's business depended on the blurred boundaries of tributary, gift and market logics (ibid.). For Ssorin-Chaikov, the case complicates a distinction between gift exchange between 'relatives' in kin-based 'traditional' societies and commodity exchange between 'strangers' in 'modern' societies. Exposing ambiguities between meanings of exchanges, "the Russian fur trade in the Siberian Sub-Arctic expanded on a complementarity of 'gift' and 'tribute', and 'sharing' and 'trade'" (ibid: 358). Ssorin-Chaikov (p. 358, 359) further challenges an assumption that exchange parties share transaction meanings, and with Bourdieu emphasises timing of gift and counter-gift as "crucial for playing on the differences between forms of exchange and for re-drawing social boundaries between participants".

Ssorin-Chaikov's attention to ambiguities in transaction meanings is useful in considering exchange forms involving jade. Jade jewellery is a common gift from man to woman as a kind of betrothal gift, as bridewealth, or as a gift of affection in marriage. As I have noted, jade is also often inherited from mother to daughter, and gifted in guanxi relations; for example by a real-estate developer to a government official in exchange for a building permit. In these cases, transaction meanings are guided by the temporality of the exchange and by the relationship between giver and receiver. What one actor considers a 'gift of affection,' another might consider a 'payment'. The latter has traditionally been the meaning of bridewealth in Chinese marriages, where a "groom's family pays a bride *price* that compensates the bride's family not simply for the costs of rearing her, but for her lost future earning capacity", while under capitalist conditions "the money that symbolizes female reproductivity can become a price, and woman a purchase" (Gates 1987: 266). In contemporary China, it would usually be immoral to sell jade given as 'betrothal gift' or 'inheritance', while it is less problematic for the government official to convert a 'gift' of jade from a real-estate developer into monetary form. But 'delayed return' of the

building permit in exchange for a gift of jade may be necessary to 'misrecognise' calculative aspects of the transaction, as Bourdieu (1990: 68, 105) argued.

While ethnographic studies of commodity chains or 'the social life of things' may reveal synchronic contestations and changes in meanings and values of things across localities, historical studies point to such changes over time. In *The Social Life of Opium*, Yangwen Zheng (2005) shows how the interactions between foreign suppliers, Chinese compradors and corrupt government officials facilitated the penetration of opium from Shanghai into China's interior. Opium has changed status several times in China. The "craving for foreign stuff' originated in maritime trade and spread from the court, the literati and the officials, where it signalled status, sophistication and affluence, to ordinary people, and helped creating a mainstream consumption of opium in China (ibid: 8, 204): "When the rich smoked it, it was cultured and a status symbol; when the poor began to inhale, opium smoking became degrading and ultimately criminal" (ibid: 4). Meanings associated with jade have likewise changed throughout Chinese history, and function as cultural resources that carvers, traders, and consumers draw upon in craft, business, and social identity projects. Dorothy Ko (2017) examines inkstones as a lense into sociocultural and epistemological transformations among Chinese scholars and artisans in the early Qing dynasty. Ko addresses a traditional valorisation of intellectual ability over craft skills that resulted in a 'denigration of craftsmen' (ibid: 5), but argues that hierarchical distinctions between artisan and scholar were more ideal than practical, and proposes the terms 'scholar-artisan' and 'artisan-scholar' to point to these as fluid, rather than predetermined and distinct identities. Ko further addresses gender divisions in the period. I found that artistic feicui carving is associated with 'high culture' and that master carvers were among the highest educated people in Ruili and employed substantial scholarly research in their art. Only one woman was considered a master carver in Ruili, and I present her explanation for this gender imbalance in Chapter 4.

Common for the studies presented above, I suggest, is a more or less implicit attention to relations between *domains*, *contents*, and *flows*. Studying the flows of material things may concretise domains – which here includes policies, laws, norms, markets, exchange logics, knowledge, concepts, and social positions – and their interrelations. Flows of things establish a relationship between domains, which is both practical in creating mutual efficacies between domains and analytical in allowing for ethnographic comparison of domains. The efficacy of flows can be that the objectified relation between domains reaffirms their content; for example, that the sale of an inherited feicui bracelet confirms a notion of morally exclusive exchange spheres, and

is denigrated. But flows of commodities can also change the content of domains; for example when the Chinese term for jade, *yu*, came to include feicui in the early 18th Century due to Chinese import of Burmese jadeite. Content may be seen here as emerging in a relationship between the relative statis of domains and the process of flow. My study resonates with the studies discussed above in that the main focus is not on things themselves. Rather, I consider how properties and flows of things may both objectify and influence domains and their contents, and engender imaginations of continuity and change.

## Change and Continuity

Change is a dominant feature of life in contemporary China. New built environment, infrastructure, market devices, music genres, and investment fads constitute 'technologies' for making and imagining worlds. Pointing to new highways, Chinese car and phone brands, cleaner streets, and currency exchange rates, some Han Chinese informants expressed pride that China is more 'developed' (*fazhan*) than neighbours like Myanmar. But cultural revivals also seem to intensify in a context of pervasive changes. Huawei phones have not made jade redundant as a symbol of national pride and identity. Below, I discuss three ways in which changes and continuities are imagined in post-Mao China.

First, the private market has been posited as a transformative force in discussions about whether the unleashing of market forces may impinge upon political power and orthodoxy in China, for example through consumerism. Michael Dutton (1994: 4) described China's economic reforms as 'opening a Pandora's box' of an 'all consuming' capitalist mode that forces the state to further market initiatives, while Deborah Davis (2000) argued that individual desires and entitlements nurtured by urban China's 'consumer revolution' may challenge official discourse, conventions and the political status quo. On the other hand, post-structuralist approaches focusing on the production and self-disciplining of a Chinese consumer have argued that consumerism diverts attention from political reforms (Y. Yan 2000; Rofel 2007); that positing consumerism as a liberating project masks capitalist exploitation in the production of Chinese industrial producers as consumers (Ngai 2003); and that the discourse of population 'quality' (*suzhi*), which drives Chinese people towards new consumption practices, signifies a new neoliberal form of governance (H. Yan 2003). Political power is still firmly in the hands of the CCP in the Xi Jinping-era, and

censorship, surveillance, crackdown on dissent and heterodoxy, 're-education', and self-disciplining is intensifying with the aid of digital facerecognition, a social credit system, and big data algorithmic analysis. China's economic power translates as rising global political power. So far, the introduction of market economy in 1978 has not fundamentally changed political structures and orthodoxy in China. Still, located more than 3.000 kilometres from Beijing, 'the Emperor is far away' in places like Ruili.

Secondly, as noted, people may imagine change and continuity through the 'technologies' of material forms. Scholars have discussed how postsocialist transformations in the early 1990s were imagined through materialities like cash money in Romania (Verdery 1996: Chapter 7) and Russia (Lemon 1998) and villas of the new rich in Russia (Humphrey 2002: Chapter 9). While the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 halted subcultural youth rebellion in China (Drissel 2008), scholars have examined how new hybridized subcultures developed from the early 1990s in domains like nightlife, gender, and sexuality (Farrer 2002, 2008; Rofel 2007), literature (Barmé 1992; Li 2005; Lu 2008; Weber 2002; Zhong 2006), music (De Kloet 2005, 2010; Efird 2001), the Internet (Farrer 2007; Liu 2011; G. Yang 2003), and advertising (J. Wang 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Yu, Chang and Ireland 2007). The Chinese *dakou* ('hole punch') generation emerged in the early 1990's, when the counterfeiting industry had not yet met demand left unsatisfied by censorship. American companies sold old LP records and CDs to China as waste plastic, which were punched with holes to render them unusable. But this only destroyed one or two songs, and dakou products illegally entered markets especially in coastal cities like Shanghai, where many youths in the early 1990s first listened to Western music via dakou products (de Kloet 2008, 2010). As the content of global flows, these illegal cultural commodities functioned as technologies for imaginations of a changing Chinese society and the outside world, and for new subcultural identities. Shanghainese author Mian Mian (2003: 152) describes the dakou phenomenon thus: "These notched and holey recordings [...] were like a huge gift from heaven [...] Sick and tired of waiting, we were finally entering a new world […] those of us who listened to hole-punched records came to be known as the Hole-Punch generation". A few years later, copyrights-infringing products like burned CDs had similar roles.

Manifesting an iterative approach to creation, also China's so-called *Shanzhai* products carry connotations of rebellion (Han 2011). The word Shanzhai originally referred to 'mountain fortresses' used by ancient Chinese bandits, but came to characterise Chinese-produced products, which are distinguishable from the

copyrighted, trademarked or patented brands they mimick through minor alterations in form, design or logo; for example mobile phones resembling the design of iPhones, but attached with telephoto lenses. Characterized by "mimesis, primitive technology, small operation, low cost, swift market adaptation, customer-tailored design", Shanzhai products appealed especially to urban youth, for whom they "symbolize an alternative attitude which mingles entertainment with non-mainstream factors" (Wu and Li 2011: 2-3). Drawing upon Marxist and structuralist semiotic approaches, Hebdige (1979: 2-3, 19) posited hegemony as the framing by dominant classes of all competing definitions within a naturalised ideological space, while resistance is positioned in "the surfaces of subculture – in the styles made up of mundane objects which have a double meaning", and expressed in "potentially subversive readings" or "subterranean style". Through engagement with dakou products, some Chinese youth bypassed and started criticizing official readings and censorship of Western music in the early 1990s. From the late 1990s and early 2000s, Shanzhai and counterfeit products were affordable new technologies with added rebellious connotations of bypassing Western Intellectual Property Rights-protected commercial hegemony. While I do not propose similar subcultural potentials of feicui, carvers introduce new ideas through new material forms; for example jade Buddhas carved in profile or without a face, jade carvings of themes from the Mao-era and from local ethnic minority culture, and carvings in non-jade materials.

Finally, changes in the post-Mao era are accompanied by distrust and concerns about what can be considered genuine, valuable, safe, and moral. 'Authenticity anxieties' are likely to proliferate during increased commodification and intensified circulation of unfamiliar people and objects (Notar 2006), and manifest in China in discussions about melamine-tainted milk powder and contaminated water resources, polluted air, substandard counterfeit goods, imposter monks, lack of morality and population 'quality', corruption, and lavish consumption of the new rich. Yunxiang Yan (2011: 40) discussed a public perception of moral crisis and declining social trust in China since the 1980s (see also Yan 2009). *Social trust* is "generalized trust in social institutions, that they will behave in accordance with the stated rules, in experts who will guard the rules to make the institutions work well, and also in strangers who will engage in peaceful and nonharmful social ineractions" (Yan 2011: 59). *Personal trust* "is only invested in people who are in ones social web, ranging from family, kinship, and local community, to a wider yet still well-defined network of friends", and derives from long-term interactions with the same people (ibid.). Yan argues that traditional Chinese morality features low social trust, and that social trust has declined in the

current market economy, while self-interest and profit-making has risen. As the state withdraws as a provider of social security, people engage in frantic feicui business to fashion fortunes as fast as possible. But the pursuit of profits has also brought an abundance of counterfeit feicui to the market. As I discuss in Chapter 8, the low social trust in institutions and people outside one's immediate social network as qualifiers of authenticity and value of feicui amplifies a necessity for traders of cultivating personal knowledge about the material.

Yan (p. 71) argues that the Chinese party-state's continuing suspicion about the autonomy of the individual and the independence of society "seriously limit the possible sources by which the individual can reconstruct a new moral self to face today's unprecedented wealth and materialism". Rather than solving this moral issue, the increase of wealth "has intensified the contradiction between the spiritual and the material and led to an increased sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness amidst a booming economy" (ibid). In a volatile world of material abundance, or 'fullness', which is often not considered trustworthy and genuine, jade – with its long cultural history and unchangeable materiality – constitutes a more transcendent domain of authenticity, spirituality, and even morality for some of those who develop intimate knowledge about the material.

# 2. Configuration: Methodological Considerations

Jadeitite rocks containing feicui can be seen as singular configurations, which are formed through chemical and physical processes under particular geological and climatic conditions. Analogically, we may consider ethnographic data as interactively and processually formed singular configurations, from which the ethnographer identifies wider social processes. Considering relations between ethnographer, ethnography, and ethnographic representation, this chapter discusses how information for the dissertation has been formed.

While the purpose of this study is not to examine feicui as an isolated object, my fieldworks involved getting to know not just places and people, but also jade. The American author-protagonist in Ben Lerner's (2011) novel *Leaving the Atocha Station* refers to the temporal process of becoming familiar with a place – in this case Spain - as standardising (p. 163):

> In other moments, however, the discourse of the real would seem to fall on the side of Spain; this, I would say to myself, referring to the hemic taste of chorizo or the aromatic spliff or both of those things on Teresa's breath, this is experience, not because things in Iberia were inherently more immediate, but because the landscape and my relation to it had not been entirely standardized. There would of course come a point when I would be familiar enough with the language and terrain that it would lose its unfamiliar aspect, a point at which I would no longer see a stone in Spain and think of it as, in some essential sense, stonier than the sedimentary rocks of Kansas, and what applied to stones applied to bodies, light, weather, whatever.

The quote coins standardising as a process, through which the sensual experience of the unfamiliar is made familiar. Based upon immersion in an unfamiliar world, this process should resonate with ethnographers. Ethnographic fieldwork is an ambiguous practice and experience, which at once encompasses the unfamiliar and the familiar, and creates both distance and intimacy, antipathies and sympathies. Ethnographers

commonly emphasize the necessity of long fieldworks for building relationships and trust with informants (e.g. Sjöberg 2011: 17-18). In Chinese, an unfamiliar person is called 'raw' or 'uncooked' (*shengren*), while a familiar person is called a 'cooked person' (*shuren*). It took time to get to know people in Ruili well enough to ask sensitive questions about their business and to assess the motivations and validity of their answers. Also, the omnipresent jade stones in Ruili were in a way 'stonier' – to stay in Lerner's phenomenological universe – when I first arrived there in 2013, than during my fieldwork in 2018. My fieldworks thus involved 'standardising' or 'cooking' people and jade, as I became more familiar with what was initially unfamiliar.

In 2015, when I was in the Kachin State capital of Myitkina, I had a fever one night. I woke up sweat-drenched around 4 am with a vivid dream lingering in my mind. In the dream I was pushing a big jade stone up a hill in a forest, and I woke up as I arrived with the stone in Myitkina. Jade entered my fieldwork life, also in ways I was not conscious about. Its gradual standardising in my experience facilitated adjustments of questions to jade traders, carvers, and buyers. Likewise, participation in the social lives of informants standardised local interaction forms as part of my cultural repertoire, which I could employ to access new domains of informants' lives. While standardising of feicui and social life in the field here implies growing familiarity, or *intimacy*, it also facilitates a *distancing* analytical categorisation of phenomena into domains. This dynamics between intimacy and distance underlines the ethnographic imperative of making the unfamiliar familiar and the familiar unfamiliar.

I did a total of 12 months of fieldwork in Ruili in 2013 (5 months), 2014-2015 (6 months) and 2018 (1 month). This 5-year timespan offered a view into economic fluctuations in Ruili's gemstone markets. I contextualised my fieldworks in Ruili with research in other nodes in China, Myanmar, and Thailand to acquire an overview of mining, carving, trade and use of feicui in a wider region. In China, these nodes include Shanghai on the east coast and Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan Province, as well as the cities of Mangshi, Lianghe, Yingjiang, and Tengchong, and the villages of Hehua and Heshun, all located in the China-Myanmar borderlands. I was in Shanghai for two months and had a 10 months research stay at Yunnan University of Nationalities in Kunming. I interviewed gem traders in Chiang Mai, Mae Sai, Doi Pui and Mae Salong in Northern Thailand, an important region in the jade trade from 1949 until the early 1990s, as well as in Bangkok, a hub for the global trade of coloured gemstones. In Myanmar, I interviewed gem traders in Tachileik on the Myanmar-Thai border, in Mandalay, and in the Kachin State capital of Myitkina.

I visited museum exhibitions of jade in Shanghai and New York, and jade auctions in London and Copenhagen. Finally, I traded Danish amber to Chinese buyers, which offered a hands-on experience of how Chinese gemstone trade is practiced, and opened up reciprocal relations with jade traders in Ruili.

While most end users of feicui jewellery are women, the majority of Ruili's traders and carvers are men, and as a man I had easier access to both professional and private lives of male informants. My deepest integration became into that of a network of elite male Han Chinese jade traders and carvers in Ruili. While I present a spectrum of voices in the dissertation, some readers may object to a dominance of male perspectives or bemoan some informants' practices and opinions as chauvinist. But should we censor voices we do not like or criticise them from a particular moral-ideological position? And what are the scientific and ethical implications of speaking *for* and *about* people we have not spoken *with*? As some theory is elevated to moral ideology, Proctor's (2008) discussion of how ignorance is produced by shading or tainting information is pertinent. While I believe the ethnographic task is to convey and conceptualise - rather than to morally judge - informants' perspectives, I do hope for the dissertation to open up for ethical debates about the feicui industry.

In this chapter, I first outline the development of Ruili's feicui markets from 2013 to 2018. Next, I discuss some forms of interactions and exchanges that informants and I have engaged in during my fieldworks. Finally, I present three cases that demonstrate how analytical themes emerged through my interactions with informants.

## Following Ruili's Jade Markets

The spatial distribution of my fieldworks in Ruili unfolded in concordance with developments in local, national, and regional feicui markets. There are jade shops all over Ruili, but the gravity of the trade is concentrated in particular sites that shift over time.

In 2013, Ruili's feicui trade was concentrated in the bustling *Zhubaojie* jade bazaar in the northern part of town, which catered especially to Chinese tourists, and hosted a large community of ethnic Rohingya jade traders. Comprising a maze of alleyways hosting jade shops, stalls, and street vendors, a government official I interviewed described the bazaar as too 'disorderly'. In 2012, the local government initiated a renovation of the area, which would host a Jade Boulevard running south in a

diagonal line from a newly constructed government building that sits on a hill overlooking Ruili's extension south to its border with the city of Muse in Myanmar's Shan State.

However, due to president Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign and a recession in the Chinese economy, the inflow of jade-buying tourists all but halted from 2014 as consumer demand declined for top-, and mid-grade feicui. Rising online trade also influenced the market at this time. Traders advertised and received payment for feicui via the WeChat app, and then sent the products customer. Vendors could thus avoid paying rent for shops, while customers avoided travel, and hotel costs for going to Ruili to buy feicui. The mobile phone was becoming a ubiquitous agentive 'market device' in the feicui trade (see Muniesa, Millo, and Callon 2007). Supply was likewise a factor. In 2013, Ruili's traders said overexploitation was depleting the mines. At this time there was also fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KIA in the jade mining areas, and mining was shut down in periods. Both factors meant that high-quality feicui was getting harder to come by in Ruili. But experienced traders calculated with these factors and hoarded good-quality stones, anticipating that prices would increase when supply declined. Many feicui shops in the Zhubaojie bazaar did not re-open after Spring Festival in February 2014. Meanwhile, by 2015, master carvers and high-level traders were moving into two newly constructed jade market towns in southern Ruili - the *Delong* and *Jinxing* markets – where there was more trade in 'betting stones' and high-grade jewellery.

In 2018, the Jinxing market was abandoned and appeared as a ghost town, while most shops in the Delong market had been rented out. Every night until midnight, the Delong market also hosted a busy outdoor market, where traders rented a small temporary stall or a square metre of the asphalted ground, where they put a cloth, from which they primarily sold low, to medium-grade feicui stones. Also, in eastern Ruili, the Tenglong market, completed in 2015, hosted feicui shops and carving workshops. But the real action was now further south in Jiegao, an adjacent 2.4 km2 Border Trade Zone south of Ruili, just by the Myanmar border. Here, the trade was done via *Zhibo*, a mobile phone app for livestreaming also used for online auctioning. Burmese suppliers brought jade to Chinese middlemen, who via the Zhibo interface filmed the jade and sold it for the highest bid to clients from all over China. The Chinese middleman took a cut of the price, and the jade was sent to the buyer. Most jade sold via Zhibo was low-grade quality jewellery ranging from a few thousands to twenty thousand *Yuan*. This market was bustling from around 10 am to 2 pm and from 10 pm until 4 am. At this time, the renovation of the old Zhubaojie jade bazaar

had stopped, and the area was derelict with half-finished and abandoned buildings. Many Rohingya traders had stayed put because of the cheap rent, but the shops saw few customers.

My fieldworks therefore gradually moved from north to south - from the old Zhubaojie bazaar in northern Ruili, via the Delong market town in southern Ruili, to Jiegao south of Ruili - as I followed the centre of gravity of a market that changed rapidly as traders responded tactically to the intertwined factors of mining practices and armed conflicts in Myanmar, and national policies, economic developments, and new market technologies in China.

## 2013: The Palatial Hotel and the Zhubaojie Bazaar

When I arrived in Ruili in 2013, I checked into the Palatial Hotel, a newly constructed building opposite the Zhubaojie jade bazaar. Three friends from the Hunan Province - Mr Liu, Mr Wang and Mr Chu, all in their early 30s - had rented the land from a local ethnic Dai woman. They had operated a hotel in Guangzhou, and relocated to Ruili, because they heard business opportunities were good here. They chose this location because of the local government's plan to renovate the Zhubaojie bazaar. Two brothers of the Dai landowner worked in the Ruili city government; one brother in the land resource bureau, and another brother in the construction bureau. "They know the situation and how this area will change, so our investments will be safe", one of the hotel bosses said.

The hotel bosses signed a rental contract for 12 years, and paid 240.000 *Yuan* in annual rent for the first 5 years, then the price would increase by five per cent. Their total investment, including construction and interior decoration, was 3.1 million *Yuan*. In 2013, the hotel bosses said 95 per cent of the rooms were booked on any given day. The hotel had 44 rooms. Guests usually paid 158 *Yuan* per room, while returning customers paid 138 *Yuan.* During holidays and festivals, they charged 480 *Yuan* per room. 40 rooms occupied at any day with an average price of 145 *Yuan* (since some clients received a discount) would amount to around 2.1 million *Yuan* annually. Subtracting rent (240.000 *Yuan*), staff salaries (540.000 *Yuan*), and utilities (90.000 *Yuan*) meant an annual profit of around 1.25 million *Yuan*, not including higher prices during festivals and holidays. On top of this came profits from a tea salon and a massage parlour on the ground floor.

From a suite in the hotel, the bosses also operated sessions of illegal gambling. They further seemed to take a middleman cut from hosting sex workers at the hotel.

A business card with a telephone number and a picture of a woman in lingerie was sometimes slipped underneath my door, and I saw cars delivering and picking up young women at the hotel late at night. The hotel bosses took me to a 'big hall' (*dating*), where young women were 'auctioned off' as hostesses. A hostess would drink with the client offering the highest bid for her. Six of these women lived at the Palatial Hotel, and two friends of the hotel bosses 'won bids' on two of them at the 'big hall', paying 600 and 800 *Yuan*, respectively. I was surprised, because the two women had told me the men were their boyfriends at the hotel, where the women participated in gambling sessions in the big suite. But as I shall discuss in Chapter 5, mixing money, sex, and intimacy is not universally seen as immoral in China.

In 2013, the Palatial Hotel saw a flow of jade traders from Myanmar and Chinese tourists coming to Ruili to buy jade. The hotel bosses had a feicui shop in the Zhubaojie jade bazaar, where they brought hotel guests. Business contacts and deals were also made in the hotel lobby, where I spent many hours chatting with the hotel bosses, jade traders, and customers. While the lobby was the 'face' of the hotel and the domain of the bosses, homecooked lunches with the staff on the rooftop of the hotel provided a 'backstage' atmosphere for informal conversations, joking, and gossip. The staffs were mainly Burmese Chinese from Muse and local Dai and Jingpo, and were paid between 1500 and 3000 *Yuan* per month. Most female receptionists and male security guards were in their early 20s and did not stay in the jobs for long, while most cleaning ladies were local middle-aged women. Burmese workers need a visa, working permit, and residence permit to work in China, but far from everybody go through the official process.

Every day, I would walk to the Zhubaojie jade bazaar, examine jade, and talk to vendors. The busy atmosphere in the jade bazaar induced a methodological practice that Thomas Gold (1989: 180) calls 'guerilla interviewing', defined as "unchaperoned, spontaneous but structured participant observation and interviews as opportunities present themselves". As I got to know traders better, I did longer interviews in teahouse or at the Palatial Hotel. When customers dwindled in the Zhubaojie bazaar from 2014, I started spending more time at the Delong market, where I was expanding my network via my friendship with Mr Huang.

## 2014-2015: The Delong Market and Ruili's Jade Elite

Mr Huang became a key informant and my gatekeeper to a community of elite Han Chinese feicui traders and carvers in Ruili. Huang was vice-chairman of the Ruili Gem Trade Association (*Ruili zhubao shehui*). He also worked in the Ruili city government, most recently as the vice-chairman of the propaganda department, until he retired in 2015, then in his mid-50s, entitled to a pension after 30 years of government service. When we first met in 2013, Huang was also co-owner of the 'Many Gemstones' Company; a 3600 m2 three-buildings complex with a museum exhibiting award-winning feicui carvings and a shopping area with feicui jewellery, priced from a few hundred to several million *Yuan* a piece. In one building, buyers could experience carvers at work, and posters informed about mining and gemmology of feicui. Huang's partner, Mr Xu, was a renowned master carver from the Fujian Province. As director, Huang defined business and advertising strategies, while his daughter, who had studied art history in Kunming, was the company's manager.

Huang had arrived in Ruili from the Jiangxi Province at the age of four with his father, who was stationed there as a military officer. After studying journalism in Kunming, Huang worked for a newspaper in Ruili. Later, he took a job as a teacher in a Jingpo village northwest of Ruili, where he lived with a local family. Here, Huang developed a passion for local ethnic minority culture, and he often took me for dinners in Jingpo restaurants in the mountains surrounding Ruili. After four years in the village, Huang resumed his work as a journalist in Ruili. Writing some articles on the bourgeoning jade trade, he developed a keen interest in feicui. He started buying 'betting stones', opened a 'window' in their skin or had them cut or carved, and then sold them. Huang became rich from the feicui trade, started to collaborate with master carvers, and eventually opened the Many Gemstones Company, where he exhibited works of the master carvers, and in some cases commissioned them to carve stones. Huang's job in the local government gave him a wide network and valuable information about policies and developments in the jade market. Huang had made deals with tourist companies that brought busloads of tourists to his company to buy feicui. But also the Many Gemstones Company experienced a market recession following the national economic slowdown and anti-corruption campaign, and Huang told me a new law forbade underhand deals between companies and tourist agencies. Huang thus had to change his economic strategies. When I returned to Ruili in 2014, The Many Gemstones Company was empty and had a For Sale sign on its façade, the price listed at 17 million *Yuan*. But by 2018 the building was empty and now derelict.

In 2014, Huang had started a new company named 'Prosperous Jade' with a new partner, also surnamed Xu, in the newly constructed Delong jade market in the southern part of Ruili. Mr Xu was a quiet, self-effacing man in his late 50s, and it proved hard to get information about his business and private life. But as I befriended the two younger brothers of his wife, who are ethnic Chinese from Myanmar's Shan state and high-profile gem traders with ruby mines in Mogok, north of Mandalay, I gathered a few pieces of the puzzle. Mr Xu had left his native Yunnan Province at the age of 17, allegedly carrying only 500 *Yuan*, to join a Kokang militia in Myanmar. He later made contacts in the KIA and started trading jade. Eventually, his contacts and capital allowed him to acquire feicui mining concessions in the Kachin State. When I met Mr Xu, he had 56 mining pits, some of which were turning out tonnes of high-quality feicui worth hundreds of millions *Yuan*, going by their official sales prices in Ruili. Some of the stones were stored in guarded rooms in the Prosperous Jade Company. The company's general manager, Mr He, and the store manager Mrs Hou, both slid off on my questions about ownership of the mines, but Mr He once mentioned that they were KIA-controlled. It was also difficult to get information about how the stones were transported, protected and taxed during their journey from the Kachin State to Ruili. Mr He said that only Mr Xu and his most trusted people know. When I asked if ethnic militias guarded the cargo, he said, "this is quite possible, but actually I cannot talk about it, even if I knew".

The working division between the mine owner and company boss, Mr Xu, and its director, Mr Huang, was roughly that Xu supplied the stones, while Huang sold them. Huang rented a three-storey building at the Delong Market, arranged the interior decoration, hired 20 staff (from security guards to a general manager), and set up accounting, tax payments, and advertising. Huang's most important contribution, however, was his social networks with feicui carvers in Ruili and buyers throughout China. Some stones were sold to carvers, or Huang commissioned master carvers to carve stones, which were sold in the exhibition room of the company. But the main business was in skin-covered betting stones with a few 'windows'. While the Many Gemstones Company sold carved jewellery, the decline in this mid-end market prompted Huang to divert his investments into the absolute high-end market of high-quality betting stones. Prices ranged from some tens of thousands of *Yuan* to hundreds of millions of *Yuan* for a single stone. The Prosperous Jade Company's clients were big jade companies, top-end investors and master carvers.

In December 2014, Huang offered me to use his office in the Prosperous Jade Company. I then moved into a room at the Delong Market, and went to the

company every day to chat with the staff around a tea table in the jewellery exhibition room. I would also walk around the market and talk to traders and carvers. In the afternoons, I used Huang's office to write field notes. Huang often took me out to dine with his associates from Ruili's elite jade carving and trading community, or with out-of-town jade buyers or journalists. Such banquets often slid into drinking in bars and singing in KTVs. Huang also brought me to the annual outing of the Propaganda Department of the city government and of the Prosperous Jade Company, and I was presented to a full hall of Ruili's elite jade trading community at a New Year Gala hosted by the owner of the Jinxing Market Town. These activities solidified my relationship with Huang and expanded my network among Ruili's elite jade carvers and traders. Huang was remarkably generous in sharing his social network with me, and his associates started invited me for outings, lunches, and dinners.

Most of my engagements with Mr Huang and his business partners, associates, and protégées occurred in 'backstage' contexts of restaurants, bars, and KTVs. Based on research among business elites in Chengdu, Osburg (n.d.) argues: "While it can pose practical obstacles and ethical pitfalls, gaining access to the backstages of elite domains can help to contextualise the scripted answers generated by institutions and provide us with a fuller, richer understanding of elite lifeworlds". Osburg's access to backstage settings of nightclubs and KTVs, where "corrupt deals, bribes, and other assorted illicit activity" played out between Chinese businessmen and officials made him conceptualise elite power in China "not as neatly contained in particular institutions, such as government bureaus or large companies, but as fundamentally a network, one that straddled state and society as well as licit and illicit worlds" (ibid). My engagements with Huang and people in his network likewise suggest that such networks *are* the business and capital in the feicui trade.

Huang presented me as his 'Danish friend', who was writing a dissertation about jade, which seemed uncontroversial. But Huang was a powerful man, and I was probably accepted in his network simply due to his vouching for me. I only encountered suspicion from the head of the propaganda department, who asked me to send proof of my university inscription alongside my interview guides.

## 2018: Jiegao and Online Jade Auctions

When I returned to Ruili in 2018, I habitually booked myself into the Palatial Hotel. But I could hardly recognise the place. Except from a few Rohingya jade trader

tenants, the hotel was empty. After only 5 years, the hotel was run-down, dirty, and the walls and ceilings of the rooms were mouldy. The old bosses were gone. The new owner said he rented the hotel from them, and that they had moved back to the Hunan Province. He was also from the Hunan Province, he said. A friend recommended a newly constructed hotel in the southern part of Ruili. As I checked in, I met one of the previous Hunan bosses of the Palatial Hotel in the reception. This was their hotel. He said the new owner of the Palatial Hotel was not from Hunan, but from Jiangxi Province. "He lied to you, beacuase he wanted to keep you as a customer", the Hunan boss laughed. Since I was last in Ruili in 2015, the Hunan bosses had opened three new hotels in Ruili and two in Mangshi. Their flagship was the newly opened Jade Pond Hotel, where I was now checking in, which hosted 200 rooms on 17 floors. Aside from a restaurant, a bar, and massage rooms, the hotel would also host a spa. The Jade Pond Hotel was a step up from the Palatial Hotel, and the standard room price was 238 *Yuan*. "You can see how fast we expanded our business", one of the bosses said, "in Ruili you can get rich very fast". The hotel was almost fully booked every day. In 2015, the Hunan hotel bosses shared a black Nissan sedan. Now, one of them drove a BMW 525, another a Volvo V-70, and the third boss drove a Mercedes 220.

That evening, Huang picked me up at the hotel. The Prosperous Jade Company was now closed down. "The Chinese economy is not good now, and people cannot afford expensive stones anymore", Huang said. He took me to Jiegao to see the bustling trade in low-grade jade jewellery, conducted as online auctions via the Zhibo mobile phone app. Thousands of Burmese jade suppliers flocked around Chinese Zhibo operators, who auctioned off their jade to buyers in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. "The Zhibo market will be frying for several years", Huang grinned. Huang was orchestrating a major business venture, and opening up yet another company. He had made guanxi with a capital fund billionaire from Hong Kong, who owned opal mines in Australia, and convinced him to invest 60 million *Yuan* in the construction of three company buildings in Ruili. Huang would manage the import of the opals to Ruili, and commission jade carvers in his network to make jewellery of them. He would then employ up to 200 traders to auction off the opal jewellery alongside jade jewellery online via Zhibo from the new company buildings. Huang's 26 year-old nephew, Mr Yu, had studied IT at a German university, and invented a mobile phone app for online gambling on soccer matches, which made him a millionaire at the age of 21. Mr Yu was responsible for setting up the online infrastructure for the Zhibo business, which crucially involved methods for expanding

the group of 'followers' on the company's Zhibo accounts. When I left Ruili in August 2018, the architectural renderings of the company office had been completed and approved by a *fengshui* (geomancer) specialist that was flown in from Hong Kong, and Huang expected business to take off from the new company buildings in a year. In the context of national economic slowdown and the popularity of a new mobile phone app, Huang had again redefined his economic strategies.

As both the hotel businesses of the Hunan bosses and the gemstone businesses of Mr Huang demonstrate, markets in China fluctuate precipitiously and the timespan for which investments are 'hot' can be short. Indeed, frantic investments and price raises in particular commodity sectors in contemporary Chinese markets are often described colloquially with metaphors signifying temperature. Jinghong Zhang (2014) relates how traders 'stir roasted' (*chao*) the market for Yunnanese Puer tea in the late 2000s, while Ellen Hertz (1998) studied the 'stock market fever' (*gupiao re*) in Shanghai in the early 1990s. In Chapter 4, I note some implications of the 'stir roasting' speculation in feicui, while in Chapters 3 and 8, I link Chinese demand for jade to a 'national culture fever' (*guoxue re*) in the current era.

## Code-Switching, Politeness, and Reciprocity

My informants in Ruili included jade traders, byers, carvers, cutters, and polishers of Chinese and Burmese nationality and of Han Chinese, Dai/Shan, Jingpo/Kachin, Rohingya, and Bamar ethnicity. I could chat with a Rohingya jade trader in a teahouse in the morning, interview a Fujianese jade carver in the afternoon, and go to KTV with a group of Jingpo government officials in the night.

Ssorin-Chaikov (2000: 358) used the term 'code-switching' to characterise how people engaged in different exchange forms in the Soviet context, but it also captures well how Ruili's stratified multi-ethnic environment induced flexibility in interactions with people from different groups and within groups. Bringing interaction forms and contents from one context into another could be morally problematic. For example, alcohol mediated interactions with many Han Chinese, Dai and Jingpo, but would be out of place in interactions with most Muslim Rohingya, as were some Rohingya ideals of gender hierarchies and separation in Han Chinese, Dai and Jingpo contexts. Rohingya women had a back-stage presence in Ruili that I did not access, and it felt inappropriate to approach them directly. Conversely, refusing to address Han

Chinese, Dai and Jingpo women directly would be disrespectful. I thus often had to switch between different 'codes' of interaction several times daily.

Different interaction forms could also be appropriate or inappropriate within the same group, depending on situation and relationship. While kinship appellation metaphorically incorporates interaction partners as insiders in social networks (see Chapter 5), they can also indicate hierarchy and social distance. During a picnic with a group of Jingpo people, a man stood up and offered me a toast with the words "Big brother Long [my Chinese surname], let's drink!" A friend of mine irritatedly told my drinking partner to stop being so formal: "We are all friends here", he said. "But I only meet big brother Long a few times before", the guy said. Because we did not know each other well and I was older than him, my drinking partner showed respect by offering the toast standing and addressing me as big brother, expressing a politeness, formality, and hierarchy that is common in guanxi relations. But to my friend these gestures contradicted the social intimacy and informality of our friendship as an egalitarian relationship. This group of Jingpo people was part of Ruili's bar scene, and some were musicians, who played Jingpo music, 1980s Beijing rock, and Western rock. China's opening up to global flows had engendered a commensurability of experiences, which facilitated interactions around similar tastes in cultural products like music between me and especially informants below the age of 40. This group preferred chatting in the quiet informal environment of bars to the formalised drinking in noisy nightclubs and KTVs. But both 'codes' were part of their cultural repertoire. Like them, I had to master both formal and informal codes of interaction, and know when to switch between them.

Sántha and Safonova (2013) discuss how Evenki people maintain an egalitarian ethos in the context of culture contact with hierarchically organised outsiders in the Russian north through the lens of Gregory Bateson's (1972) cybernetic anthropology. They argue: "If as Gregory Bateson argues, there are three possible outcomes to culture contact (Bateson 1972: 65), then in this case, contact with other local cultures has led not to the assimilation or elimination of the Evenki, but to their persistence in dynamic equilibrium with the larger community surrounding them" (Sántha and Safonova: 5). The authors argue that ritual, violence, and drunkenness, which usually occurred in Evenki interactions with strangers, "serve to mediate culture contact and the perpetuation of Evenki ethos by obstructing communication rather than facilitating it" (ibid: 27). For example, the authors discuss ritual displays of Evenki culture to outsiders as *pokazukha* ('to show'), which provides a buffer and mediates culture contact between the egalitarian Evenki community "and other societies that

are accustomed to more rigid and hierarchical forms of organisation, such as kinship or bureaucratic institutions" (ibid: 31). Shamanism "is at once everywhere and nowhere in Evenki communities and it can be performed by anyone", but the shaman "is only called upon to perform rituals in the presence of outsiders" (ibid). Thus, rituals and shamanism "help the Evenki to negotiate and maintain relations with outsiders because within the frames of performance and ritual, direct communication is blocked and participants are freed from the need to interact with others" (ibid). We might similarly see politeness and 'pleasantries' (*ketaohua*) in Chinese guanxi relations as formal interaction forms that maintain a hierarchical social distance between relative strangers, rather than producing direct communication and intimacies between equals.

Pedersen and Bunkenborg (2012) make a similar argument by conceptualising roads as 'technologies of distantiation'. While roads are commonly thought of as 'harbingers of connectivity', the authors discuss how roads built to export natural resources from Mongolia's deserts to China "serve to curb the quantity and quality of interactions taking place between Mongolians and Chinese", and "forge an optimal balance between engagement and detachment in the Sino-Mongolian borderland" (ibid: 558). While local Mongolians viewed upon Chinese oil companies and their workers with suspicion, they also worked together and traded informally. But at the oil field, interactions between Chinese and Mongolian workers "seemed so polite and infused with measured tolerance" as to maintain "a subtly forged mutual indifference" (ibid: 563). For the Chinese manager at the oil field, the perfect set-up was "the creation of highly circumscribed if not 'automated' relations that served to keep the two sides apart while still maintaining a semblance of connection" (ibid: 564). Mongolian officials, in turn, wanted the Chinese company to establish better roads, which would ideally induce less interaction between Chinese workers and local Mongolians (ibid: 565). The authors thus conclude, "roads, in addition to representing an exemplary model of social relationships by virtue of their capacity for bringing people and places together, are also visualisation of […] their capacity to outstretch and separate things" (ibid: 567). We could likewise consider the formality, politeness and hierarchy in guanxi relations as a communicative 'infrastructure' that creates an 'optimal distance' between interaction partners, which allows them to create mutually beneficial outcomes, while blocking social intimacies that could deter such outcomes by expanding reciprocities.

I obviously accumulated social debts in my fieldworks. Some jade traders gifted me jade, which I increasingly reciprocated with Danish amber jewellery. Such exchanges

affirmed social bonds mediated by gemstones that manifested different localities and cultures, and one informant received my gift of amber with a remark that this was a 'cultural exchange' (*wenhua jiaoliu*). Ruili's gemstone markets hosted an increasing amount of amber. Most amber was of two varieties mined in the Kachin State; the bright yellow, transparent 'gold amber' (*jinpo*) and the dark red, semi-transparent 'blood amber' (*xuepo*). But some traders also sold the more opaque orange-red amber (*hupo*) and yellow 'beeswax amber' (*mila*). The two latter types came from Kaliningrad, and increasingly Ukraine. Their rising presence in Ruili's gemstone markets followed the recession in demand for high-, and mid-grade feicui, as demand and investments shifted to cheaper gemstones. This demand seemed to guide intensifying mining and shifting militarised ownership of Ukrainian amber mines following its armed conflict from 2014. But these two types of amber are also found in Denmark, and I started buying Danish amber, which saw a surge in prices driven by Chinese buyers from 2012.

I brought Danish amber stones and jewellery to Ruili. Showing and explaining the characteristics of Danish amber to jade traders in Ruili opened up new reciprocities through the exchange of knowledge and trade experiences mediated by gemstones. I now entered gem trade communities with a product of my own, and informants would tell others that I 'did amber'. Pernille Hohnen (2013) gained access to traders at a market in post-socialist Lithuania by joining the trade from her own stall. Me 'doing amber' likewise facilitated my integration into Ruili's gemstone community as a trader, if a small-scale one. Like feicui, amber constituted a material form around which conversations about price developments, supply and demand, carving styles, and material, medical and spiritual properties of gemstones developed. Through the amber, I witnessed how networks were mobilised in gemstone business. Informants asked for samples of my amber, which they brought to other traders, who showed it to their friends, and so on. Others took pictures of the amber, which they uploaded on WeChat. When a buyer was interested, we weighed and inspected the stones, and bargained until reacheding a deal. One jade trader sent some of my amber stones to a friend in Guangzhou, who had them carved and sold them there as jewellery. My friend took a cut of the profit as a middleman.

Bringing amber to China involved weighing risks of the stones being taxed or confiscated at national borders against potential profit margins, which jade traders knew well. I had to consider other issues: Should I buy rough stones or jewellery, high-quality stones or cheaper ones? How were demand, profits, and risks in different weight groups of stones? Should I sell the stones immediately, or hold on to them

hoping that prices would keep rising? Should I have the stones carved and then sell them? How should I advertise and price them? Could I find a steady supplier and cut out the middlemen? What were the criteria for evaluating quality and price? These were all questions that jade traders likewise had to ask to succeed in the business. The cardinal point in both trades was to evaluate *potentials* against *risks* in particular stones.

Trading amber also concretised a risk of other traders appropriating one's business ideas or networks, which permeates the Chinese business world across product categories. In one case, two Chinese amber traders came to Denmark to buy amber from me. After the deal, I took them to see the Danish west coast beaches, where locals pick up amber especially after autumn onshore storms. But a Chinese friend of mine said it was a misguided move, because the traders could now approach local amber pickers directly and cut me out as a middleman, which was exactly what happened. Also, in Ruili I mentioned to an amber buyer that my uncle makes aquavit with amber dust, which struck a cord for her, because crushed jade has been infused in liquid to make medicinal potions in China. A local friend said it was unwise to reveal my recipe, because the amber buyer might copy our idea.

While gifts and 'cultural exchange' of gemstone knowledge were ways to reciprocate, it was hard to repay informants for picking up bills. My attempts to pay bills were seemingly insulting by negating the host-guest relation and firmly rejected. It often seemed that the only way to reciprocate was simply by being there and playing my role as a guest, which included eating with appetite, accepting and offering toasts, distributing cigarettes, and contributing to the conversation. Conversely, rejecting invitations, refusing to eat, drink alcohol or distribute cigarettes, or being silent would make my host loose face by suggesting I did not like his and his associates' company.

When drinking with someone for the first time, he often told me to meet the next day, where he would pick me up in a car, and we would go to eat and drink, sometimes followed by a KTV visit. Delivering me at my hotel, my host would then tell me to meet again tomorrow, where the same pattern was repeated. Initiating such relationships was like getting on a rollercoaster that I could not get off of until my host decided the ride was over, and these interaction flows often lasted for 3-4 days in a row. But then they suddenly stopped, and I might not hear from my host for weeks. I supposed that the intensity of these interactions over a short timespan served to solidify a relationship fast. Once the relationship was made, there was a break in interactions, but when they were reinitiated, they often had the same pattern of being compressed into 3-4 intense days.

Sometimes, my host seemed to act on behalf of, or to solidify guanxi with someone else. Huang's nephew, Mr Yu, took me to a bar for four nights in a row. He said he owned a 350-m2 apartment in Kunming with a bar, a cinema, a chef, and a massage room, and that I could live there when I returned to Kunming. He was rarely in Kunming, and also offered me to use his Land Rover there. But after returning to Kunming, I did not hear from Mr Yu. When we first met, Huang told Mr Yu to take me out and answer all my questions, and Yu seemed to act as my host on Huang's behalf. Huang himself invited me to join his new company. He hoped to expand the online auctioning of jewellery abroad, and thought I could help with marketing in Europe. I would get a good salary, a car and a flat, he said. As in some other relationships, it was hard to determine whether the offer was genuine or expressing a politeness that was not always consequential.

## Interviews and Personhood

The 'noisy' social arenas of restaurants and KTVs did not invite for interviews, and I did them in company offices, teahouses, cafés, and carving workshops. I always did an interview guide. First, I asked about material properties, nomenclature, meanings, and prices of jade, which all professionals could talk about at length. Then I moved on to more sensitive questions about business organisation, trade routes, earnings, and taxation. Informants' narratives in recorded semi-structured interviews, where I made my own role primarily a listener, made up for some of the richest data. In the more hectic environment of the Zhubaojie jade bazaar, I rarely recorded conversations, but took fieldnotes on the spot. Taking fieldnotes during banqueting and KTV visits felt conspicuous and distancing. Here, I often went to the toilet or outside restaurants to record voice memos on my phone to remember conversations or observations. I would then write fieldnotes when I came back to my hotel at night.

In the dissertation, I present narratives by informants of different national, ethnic, social, and occupational backgrounds. Deborah Cameron's (2001: 4) argument that models for analysing written and spoken discourse in one language may be difficult to apply to another language could imply that her own discussion of how meanings and power can be practiced and revealed in spoken discourse (Chapter 10 and 11) is not universally applicable. Cameron (p. 152, 158) notes that the use of pronouns (e.g. 'we' versus 'I') can indicate particular (shifts in) voices among respondents. Individual Chinese respondents often expressed opinions using the pronoun 'we' (*women*),

which seemed to point to an idealised group belonging, consensus, and harmony that masked internal disagreements and blurred boundaries between individual and group (see also Vallaster 2000: 471). Also, statements by different people in different interviews were sometimes remarkably similar, and I wondered if they reflected the individual respondent's opinion, a rapport among jade professionals, or a shared pool of 'Chinese jade knowledge'. It could be difficult to pinpoint the group, and 'we' could refer to hometown friends, kin, ethnic group, and nationality, depending on situation. For example, one informant's statement that "our body is not like yours" signified her belief that Western medicine is not always effective on Chinese people. Informants continually emphasised how 'We Chinese' are different from 'You Westerners' across a range of registers, giving rise to a particularistic notion of what it means to be 'Chinese' that does not seem to integrate easily with cosmopolitan ideas about being a 'citizen of the world'. Chinese author Xiaolu Guo (2017) reflects on how she was uncomfortable using the first person singular 'I', when she arrived in the UK, because Chinese are not used to thinking about themselves as a separate entity in society:

> I discovered that I used the first-person plural too much in my everyday speech. In the west, if I said "We like to eat rice", it would confuse people. They couldn't understand who this "we" was referring to […] I swapped to the first-person singular, as in "I like to eat rice". But it made me uncomfortable. After all, how could someone who had grown up in a collective society get used to using the first-person singular all the time? The habitual use of "I" requires thinking of yourself as a separate entity in a society of separate entities. But in China no one is a separate entity.

Gubrium and Holstein (2001: 7) mention Geertz' (1984) argument that 'the individualised self' is "a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures", but do not dwell on this crucial point. Rather, they suggest that the ability of culturally and geographically distinct people "to respond to interviews now makes it possible for us to compare their experiences in the same methodological terms" (ibid: 45). In a study of health and personhood in rural northern China, Bunkenborg (2009: 18) highlights Marriot's (1976) concept of the 'dividual', which signifies that "persons are composed of substances that may be given and received", and Strathern's discussions of personhood in Melanesia, "where persons are constituted by relations reified as substances and items received from others". A perception of Chinese personhood as constituted by social relations and exchanges more so than constituting a foundational 'entity' suggests that opinions in interviews are made on a different

ontological basis in China than in Western contexts. Due to prevalent local hierarchies, I rarely did group interviews, as persons of seniority and high status might take it upon them to express a collective voice, which was often the case in informal conversations in groups.

## Ethics and Relationships

Ethnographic presentations are always the result of choices. Gary Alan Fine (1993) presents and debunks ten 'virtuous' images of the ethnographer. Images of the *kindly, friendly* and *honest* ethnographer represent standards of observational morality. What do we do in our written accounts, for instance, with informants that we do not like, and do we always obtain informed consent? (ibid: 270-277). Images of the *precise, observant* and *unobtrusiv*e ethnographer present challenges to our competence. Do we recall the exact words of a conversation or make approximations when writing field notes? Do we mishear or misrecognize what we see, and can we avoid influencing the scene, where we do research? (ibid: 277-281). Finally, images of the *candid, chaste, fair*, and *literary* ethnographer are tied to how we present our work and ourselves. Do we leave out our embarrassing actions or unpleasant memories from our accounts? Which truths do we shade and ignore, and to which extent does our writing shade a possible lack of empirical data? (ibid: 282-289). For Fine, the point is to recognise the unobtainability of these ideals, to admit that our accounts are not exhaustive or objective: "By knowing oneself, one can improve *a bit*, but more significantly, one can recognize that the limits of the art are part of the data" (ibid: 289).

Fine's position exemplifies a current of self-reflexive approaches and experiments in textual representations prominent from the 1980s onwards. For Marilyn Strathern (1991: 8), the term 'reflexivity' in anthropology "makes a problem out of what was once unproblematic: the figure of the fieldworker" (cited in Kulick 2005: 1). This involves considering implications of the ethnographer as a 'positioned subject' (Rosaldo 1993: 170, 175). Katarina Sjöberg (2011: 10) points to how the ethnographer "is the main tool for obtaining knowledge of a people, their practices and customs and s/he is also visible in the published text". Carving out an 'academic' voice and self as distinctive from a 'personal' one can be problematic in fieldwork-based studies, where ethnographers rely on skills and properties for the interactive creation of data, which are often not taught, or possible to teach, in methods courses. As Sjöberg (p. 15) argues: "Often it is more personal characteristics of the researcher

that persons within the studied group of people connect with, providing the researcher with access to more informal milieus and arenas, where people act in more relaxed ways".

Self-reflexive approaches that insert the ethnographer's self into texts have been criticized for being 'navel-gazing', 'unaccountable to any challenge of logic or fact', and 'banal egotism' (Kulick: 2, 10). Gubrium and Holstein (1999: 563) further criticise experiments in representational practice for problematizing authorial privilege "so that ethnography devolves in some cases into a plethora of individual stories bereft of traditional moorings in social organization" (see also Wacquant 2002). While 'thick description' and narratives demand space, I employ both approaches, because they can convey the context and quotidian complexity of informants' lives, as well as contradictions in their statements. Further, I seek to convey how ethnographic insights emerge in interactions that occur on informants' premises more so than according to plans and ideals defined in university offices. While 'personal' experiences are sometimes tabooed or denigrated in academia, I maintain that the criteria for whether and how they are included in ethnographic accounts should depend on their methodological and analytical productivity.

In August 2018, I participated in a dinner at a Jingpo restaurant. The host was a Jingpo official from Ruili's city government. He introduced me to a Jingpo woman, who said we had met before. "But we don't know each other yet", she said, "We never drank alcohol together". After we had made numerous toasts in rice liquor, she said that now we knew each other, using the word 'cooked' (*shu*). The importance of alcohol consumption as a means of creating access, trust and commonality when doing fieldwork in China can hardly be overestimated. Describing production and consumption of rice beer (*blai*) among ethnic Wa in the borderlands of Yunnan and Myanmar's Shan State, Fiskesjö (2010) argues that 'participant intoxication' can provide insights into mechanisms of self-other definitions. While getting drunk together in rice beer "cements the relationships of those involved", declining to engage in the rules of mutual respect on equal terms as defined in rice beer drinking, "one also becomes defined as a non-Wa outsider" (ibid: 119). The fact that I was a foreign male ethnographer researching masculine business networks in the Yunnan Province added to the importance of alcohol in my fieldworks. First, as a foreigner, I was treated as a guest, which involved locals 'inviting' (*qing*) me to 'empty glasses' (*ganbei*) of beer or rice liquor with them as a token of their hospitality. Secondly, men are to a greater extent than women urged to drink in my fieldsites. Thirdly, alcohol is

particularly prevalent in guanxi relations among businessmen in China. Fourthly, Yunnanese are among the most 'fierce' (*lihai*) drinkers I have met in China.

Based on fieldwork among Chinese officials, Loubere (2014) points to how "vital fieldwork sometimes takes place in a drunken haze, which raises questions about the validity of data". Declining to drink with hosts in China negates the intimacy of the social relationship, and one of Loubere's strategies was to stick to beer. My hosts often asked me whether to drink rice liquor or beers at dinners, and I likewise usually insisted on beers. Still, I would sometimes come back to my hotel late at night to write field notes with my head spinning. Loubere further points to ethical issues of drinking in fieldwork; that obligations to drink extend to research assistants; that hosts usually pick up the bill; and that informants may not give consent to having information they provide when intoxicated disseminated. My fieldworks did not render these ethical issues as pressing as they were for Loubere. First, while Guoguo was a co-worker for parts of my first fieldworks and we sometimes drank with informants, she was a local and capable of setting her own boundaries. Secondly, the elite jade traders I engaged with were rich, and the drinking would not ruin them. Finally, complete informed consent seems an unattainable ideal in most fieldwork contexts. People may provide information when intoxicated that they might not have when sober. But if I understand the local mentality correctly, the point of drinking with outsiders in Ruili is exactly to open up a wider spectrum of positions, personality, and information to establish trust. Drinking together, as the Jingpo woman suggested, is a way of transforming a 'raw' outsider into a 'cooked' insider. I contend that reflections upon fieldwork ethics must consider such local notions, lest it merely judges local fieldwork interactions normatively against a standard set of values prevalent in Western universities.

Differences in ethical codes may become more obvious as ethnographers gain access to backstage spheres of informants' lives. Visits to KTVs with feicui traders sometimes included the host paying for female hostesses to 'accompany' (*pei*) the men. The hostesses' job was to sing, light cigarettes, pour beer, and offer toasts. Hostesses are embedded in gendered, ethnified power structures permeating leisure arenas, where men establish guanxi relations underpinning the jade trade. Part of their role is to create a 'lively' (*renao*) atmosphere and give the men 'face' (Osburg 2013: 62-65; Zheng 2009). While research ethics can amount to "a tolerance for ignorance" (Proctor 2008: 22), I felt it relevant to talk to the hostesses. Those I talked to were Chinese nationals and Chinese-speaking Shan, Kachin and Chinese from Myanmar. They said they took the job to support their families, but that the drinking and late

working hours was hard. Some developed relationships with clients. Such relations may be mediated by money outside the KTV, but masculinity ideals performed in KTVs seem underpinned by men's misrecognition of monetary aspects of the client-hostess relation. Osburg's (2013) elite male informants in Chengdu thus "understood the ability to attract beautiful women, without directly and transparently paying, as the ultimate confirmation of their viritily and status" (ibid: 64). I participated in two KTV sessions, where the hosts were female jade traders, who 'offered' hostesses to the men. Male jade traders brought business associates, friends, and girlfriends to KTVs, but rarely their wives. In KTV visits without hostesses, female participants often took on the role of hostesses. Once, I had a female Danish friend visiting, and the host, a government official, asked if she minded having hostesses accompany us. He said, "this is part of our culture, it's what we do when we go out with friends. But tomorrow everything is normal", thus positing relations to hostesses as not entirely morally unambiguous.

Discussing the trauma of being raped by her informant Huang (2016) argues, "it remains a problem that researchers are institutionally recognized primarily as agents of harm or liability, in relation to their research subjects", while in reality, "ethics, risk, harm, vulnerability, and power are far messier between researchers and subjects" (ibid; see also Johnson 2016). Recounting another kind of trauma, Renato Rosaldo (1993) discussed how the death of his wife in the field afforded him a comprehension of the grief and rage of Illongot headhunters in northern Philippines. Huang, Johnson, and Rosaldo approach their traumatic fieldwork experiences as a source of knowledge, and use of personal experiences in ethnographic accounts may make informants' realities "more readily accessible to readers than certain more detached modes of composition" (Rosaldo 1993: 172). My fieldworks did not include traumatic experiences, but life happens, also in the field, which can make friendship urgent. In Ruili's business world, I sensed that certain information could create vulnerabilities, and needed to be administered cautiously. I developed friendships and exchanged personal information especially with some ethnic minority peoples, because they engaged with a wider spectrum of my person and their interactions seemed less tactical and instrumental than what I experienced in the Han Chinese jade trade community.

Except from the odd tourist, a few English teachers, and the occasional group of touring Russian nightclub dancers, Ruili sees few Westerners. Locals usually asked me if I was American, while two taxi drivers thought I was from Northeast China, where people are taller. Such categorisations were based on my visible 'foreignness'. Locals giggling, pointing and whispering, "A foreigner! He is very tall!" became part of daily

life. Upon first encounters, many would take a picture with me, which uploaded to their WeChat feed was accessible to their 'friend circle' (*pengyou quan*), and some had seen my picture before we met. Connecting on WeChat had replaced the exchange of name cards during my research. I used WeChat to set up meetings and communicate with informants, and following traders' advertising of feicui on WeChat was a handy way to follow price developments. But since authorities can access one's account and contacts, I refrained from posting anything related to my research, informants, or politics (see also Svensson 2017). My long-term engagement with key informants to some extent softened my outsider status, although informants spoke standard Chinese (*Putonghua*) to me, rather than the local Yunnanese dialect or ethnic languages. Still, I sometimes felt 'like a child', who could not express my thoughts succinctly in Chinese (see Theobald 2018).

Some informants used me as a 'face' for their social networks and to acquire resources. Ethnographers must be ethically conscious, but fieldwork commonly involves navigating different ethical codes. Some of my fieldwork experiences support Huang's (2016) characteristic of ethics, risk, harm, vulnerability, and power between researchers and subjects as 'messy', more so than a unidirectional view upon the fieldworker as the only agent of power and liability in the field. Below, I present some fieldwork relationships and situations that underline how ethnographic insights are created in interactions that can create both sympathy and antipathy.

## Guoguo: Indeterminacy and Openness

When I first met Guoguo on a street corner in Mangshi, she said I looked lost. Being lost can signify a missing direction, an indeterminate state, but also the potential of initiating new directions. We went to an alleyway with food stalls, ordered barbecued meat and beers, and started talking. I had arrived in Mangshi the day before after having to interrupt my fieldwork, when my father had passed away. It had been a hectic, emotional month in Denmark, and my mind had not adjusted to being back in the field. Guoguo was in her own limbo, and she said our meeting was *yuanfen.* A term I would encounter in various contexts in my fieldworks, yuanfen can be roughly translated as destiny.

With a Bachelor degree in English and a Master degree in Ethnology, Guoguo spoke good English, and had fieldwork experience in Yunnan. Now a teacher in Mangshi, Guoguo's mother is a Zaiwa Jingpo from a mountain village nearby Ruili, where many of her relatives still live. Her father, a Han Chinese from a family of

intellectuals in Kunming, was 'sent down' to that village during the Cultural Revolution. Her father later worked as an official in the Dehong prefectural government, before retiring. He also had a stint as a feicui trader. As I got to know her better, I sensed how Guoguo balanced between a Jingpo and a Han Chinese world that were not always seamlessly conjoined. Her attachment to Jingpo people and culture seemed strongest. She identified herself as Jingpo, and introduced me to consequences of development upon Jingpo people in the area. She lamented Han Chinese appropriation of Jingpo land and the modern attractions that made Jingpo youth leave the mountains for jobs like KTV hostesses and security guards in Ruili. On the other hand, she displayed deep knowledge of Han Chinese culture that derived both from her education and an intellectual heritage in her paternal family line.

After working for a foreign NGO, Guoguo started to do painting classes with Jingpo children. She exhibited the children's paintings in China and abroad, and had made two movies about Jingpo people. Our meeting felt like a new beginning. That seemed to be what Guoguo meant by yuanfen; an encounter, which is not random, nor necessarily indefinite, but which provides a conjuncture and a common path for a time. Guoguo became a co-worker for parts of my first fieldworks. In one case, she asked questions in the Zaiwa language and the Kachin jade trader responded in the Jingpo dialect of the Kachin language. The two languages are referred to in Chinese as 'small mountain' (*xiao shan*) and 'big mountain' (*da shan*), respectively.

Guoguo was in many ways unique in Ruili's commercial atmosphere. "Business is in his blood", as she once characterised Mr Huang. With her credentials, Guoguo could likely have acquired a well-paid job in Beijing, Shanghai, or abroad, a dream scenario for many Chinese. But her mission was to give voice and joy to some ethnic kids. Alongside her gentle personality and shining brightness, this attracted people to her. A government official friend of Guoguo's said he needed to spend time with her occasionally to recharge a spirituality he felt was draining in the competitive world of officialdom, where formal courtesies may cover ulterior motives. Guoguo was like a spiritual rock that reminded people of a world of human kindness, conscience and genuineness beyond the ambitions and tactics that are 'part of the game' in Chinese business and politics. Given the omnipresence of jade and the proclivity for analogising in Ruili, it seems apt to suggest it was her interior 'jade-like' qualities of purity, idealism, and spirituality that attracted people to Guoguo. "I was very quiet", she often said about emotionally touching situations or events. Quietude (*anjing*) constitutes an opposite to the preferred 'noisy' liveliness (*renao*) in masculine guanxi

interactions in leisure arenas like KTVs. 'Being quiet' seemed to render Guoguo in sync with life. Still, sometimes we would drink Myanmar Beer and howl to Tom Waits' rusty voice.

Guoguo's stories and statements often had an open-ended or indeterminate form, so that they could be interpreted in several ways. Initially, my rigid Danish mind had a hard time coming to grips with this polyvalence. But I gradually came to appreciate that the only way of seeing things is not necessarily by locking them into mutually excluding categories - yes or no, this or that, good or bad – and I believe this to be a major progress in my fieldwork. Rather than seeking to resolve or nullify differences, I should embrace them. I had to develop an open and flexible orientation towards people and life in Ruili, and Guoguo was key in that realisation.

## A Yong: Paranoia and Guanxi

One evening Guoguo and I went to a bar in Ruili. We had talked to jade carvers all day, and I had gotten into a rhythm of turning on my recorder, when initial conversations slid into interviews. The owner of the bar seated us with A Yong, a local ethnic Dai man, who wanted to drink with me. He told me he had spent eight years in Myanmar, and I asked him what he was doing there. He said that he started to smuggle 'things' between Myanmar and China in the 1990s. I asked him which kinds of things they smuggled, and turned on my recorder. He stared at me and asked if I had just turned on the recorder? I admitted, apologised, and tried to explain that it was an unconscious reaction, because we had been doing interviews all day. He said what I had done was very impolite. Then he pointed south towards the border to Myanmar and asked me: "Do you know how much it costs to have someone killed in Myanmar"? The question was a threat, backed up by his own reply: "It only costs a few thousand *Yuan* to have someone killed there". Eventually, Guoguo's reassurance that I had turned on the recorder unconsciously, my apologies, and the bar owner's vouching for me smoothened out the situation, and with a toast A Yong suggested we forget about the incident. The following days, A Yong left messages on my WeChat, which I did not answer, until he asked why I was avoiding him. He told me to meet him at the same bar that evening.

When I arrived at the bar, A Yong seemed drunk. Seated next to him was a middle-aged man, whom he introduced as a Dai 'big boss'. 'Big boss' usually meant a wealthy businessman or a government official, but as A Yong had told me his father is in a Shan State army, it might also refer to a military officer. Given my previous mistake,

it did not feel wise to ask questions about their affairs. I knew that much business conducted in Ruili is illegal. Locals had told me that some Shan people are engaged in drug trade in Ruili, and I interviewed a local policeman, who said that while there are 'only' around 6 murders in Ruili annually, young men sometimes fight with knives after getting drunk or high on methamphetamine. While Ruili generally felt safe enough, the vagueness regarding some people's income and a sense that I could not always inquire directly into it underpinned my fieldwork there. After a few hours of drinking, A Yong told me to go for a ride with him.

Cruising up palm-lined Jiegang Road, A Yong stopped his BMW X5 by a store and bought six 70 cl. Myanmar Beers. He opened a bottle for both of us, and drove off. As we headed out of town, I became unsettled. We now drove on a dirt road. A Yong stopped the car in front of a big house surrounded by rice fields. He entered the house, and came back shortly after. Driving back towards town, A Yong took a turn, and finally stopped at a desolate place by the Ruili River. "Get out of the car", he said. By now, I was getting paranoid. Was he still angry with me for turning on my recorder the previous week, and was he now going to teach me a lesson? By the riverside, A Yong rolled a joint and said, "let's smoke". A rejection seemed unwise. The smoke made me more paranoid about A Yong's intensions. But as he finished the joint and flicked the butt out into the river, he said: "I'm glad we spent this time together. We are brothers now". We drove back through Ruili to the sound of Tupac's rap thumping from the car's stereo system. A Yong delivered me at the doorsteps of my hotel.

The two encounters with A Yong may illustrate certain local conceptions of social relationships and some predicaments of my fieldworks in Ruili. First, in hindsight, our nocturnal excursion to the Ruili River seemed to serve the purpose for A Yong of transforming me from an outsider into an insider. Without the contractual security embedded in the rule of law, trust in personal relationships is essential for businessmen in China, and cultivating business relations often involve exchange or display of actions and information that create mutual dependency. Men getting drunk together, cavorting with hostesses, and being naked together in spa baths enforce masculine guanxi relations, because they expose personal domains and create mutual vulnerabilities and dependencies. Guanxi is thus a form of reciprocity, where each person by exposing or giving part of his personal self, may ideally expect trust in return. Our smoking a joint together may in that sense be seen as a way for A Yong of 'cooking' me; that is, transforming me from an indeterminate 'raw person' into the determined position of a 'brother' within a social structure of fictive kinship.

Secondly, a creeping paranoia permeating my interactions with A Yong was underpinned by a sense that some people in Ruili were not to mess with. A month before meeting A Yong, I had been directed to a table at the same bar, where some men wanted to drink with me. One of them was a skinny man, whom the other guys declared was a contract killer. As we made some toasts, he said he had spent seven years in prison in Myanmar convicted for murder. Later, I moved to another table, and an ethnic Dai man came to toast with me. As he got drunk he started to mutter 'motherfucker', and asked why I had come to Ruili as a foreigner. I was seated, and he stood in front of me. He said that he is a local in Ruili, which could signify a power and network I did not hold. At this point, the 'contract killer' walked over and stood behind me with his hands on my shoulders. He muttered something in Dai language to my adversary, which made him retreat to his own table.

Also in this situation, my inability to determine the position and intentions of the man induced a sense of paranoia. Was he joking or was he really angry with me, and why? Did he just hate foreigners, or had I made some mistake I was unaware of? Had I asked the wrong questions to the wrong people in my fieldwork, or had I become too close to people, whose enemies I did not know of? In Ruili, social networks are essential resources of protection and support, and you are not much without them. After these incidents, I considered whom I could go to if I got in trouble, in effect a 'roof' up in the local economic and political hierarchy. If it came to it, I figured Mr Huang would be the man.

The following story of the relationship between Wang and Zhou illustrates local power dynamics and economic relationships, as well as how sympathies and antipathies can develop in fieldwork, which necessitate reflections about how ethnographic accounts are constructed.

## Wang and Zhou: Sympathy and Antipathy

> It is hot in the valley. I am driving with three ethnic Hani men alongside the Red River (Honghe), which cuts its way through the valley here in the Yuanyang County of Yunnan's Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which borders Vietnam to the south. As we ascend the mountain, the weather gets cooler. It is a two-hour drive from the Yuanyang County capital of Nansha to our village destination in the mountain. But a new, elevated highway under construction will reduce that time. The driver Mr Li, an administrative village leader, is excited about the prospects. The new road will make transport of agricultural products from the mountain to buyers in the lowland

easier, and might also attract more tourism to the villages, he says. The Duoyishu Rice Terraces, carved by Hani people on the steep mountain slopes over the past 1300 years, was listed as a UNESCO Heritage Site in 2013, and draws a crowd of tourists. Villagers run guesthouses and restaurants close to the viewpoints. But the Duoyishu Rice Terraces are on a mountain adjacent to the one we are ascending now, which sees very few tourists. Wang, who sits in the back of the car, cultivates corn, which he uses to feed his pigs, chicken, and ducks, and to make corn liquor. He makes around 100 litres of corn liquor at a time, which he sells to buyers from the lowland. The liquor business earns him 20-30.000 Yuan a year, and he figures that more tourists could increase his sales.

But in our private talks, Wang is not as excited as the administrative village leader about some changes that the road and other modernisation processes are bringing to his village. The advent of a new paved road has led villagers to abandon their houses downhill to build new ones uphill, next to the road. As the new houses are built partly with borrowed money, most young men and women leave the village for cities in eastern China to work for cash needed to pay off the loans, while their children are left behind with their grandparents in the village.

I met Wang in Ruili in 2013. At that time, Wang worked for Zhou, a Han Chinese man, who operated an alcohol company that supplied Ruili's hotels, restaurants, KTVs, and nightclubs with beer, wine, hard liquor. Zhou occasionally bought 'betting stones', had them opened, and resold them. One day he told me: "You and I are friends now. So we should buy a betting stone and gamble together". Investing money, trust, and beliefs into the content of a jade stone, it seemed, was a way to solidify and demonstrate friendship. While neither Wang nor Zhou were professional jade traders, their economic relationship exemplifies an intense, short-cycled, predatory capitalism that is characteristic of many sectors of China's current market economy, including the jade market. In 2010, Zhou had come to Wang's mountain village in Yuanyang to engage in a then frantic gold mining business, and this is how he met Wang. The Yuanyang Mountains hold large gold deposits, and some of the richest mines were located beneath Wang's family land. Zhou contracted mining labourers, which he leased out to mining companies. The business venture turned out bad for Zhou, who left for Ruili broke. In Ruili, Zhou set up an alcohol company, acquired loans and investments from different partners, and contracted workers with the promise of good salaries and learning experiences.

One investor was Zhang, a 17-year-old local girl from Ruili. Her paternal aunt had money and a great liking for Zhang, as her own daughter had passed away. Zhou convinced Zhang to borrow 400.000 *Yuan* from her aunt to invest in his alcohol company. Zhou also asked Wang to come down to work for him in Ruili. Wang is ethnic Hani and Zhang's father is Hani, while her mother is Han Chinese. In Ruili, Wang and Zhang became friends and they discovered that Zhang's 400.000 *Yuan* had vanished from the company account. Wang felt it despicable that Zhou would cheat a young girl for her family's money, and he began to retrieve the money. Wang's job in the company was as a delivery guy. He brought cases of alcohol to clients around town and sometimes across the border to Myanmar on a three-wheeled motorbike with a truck bed. When he received payment, he put some money into Zhang's account. Over time, Wang managed to acquire all of Zhang's money. Zhou did not immediately find out. He was busy acquiring new loans, and he made Wang fabricate fake receipts and account figures so that the company seemed to have plenty of capital and stock that could be used as collateral.

Zhou was a skinny man with a crew cut, at that time in his mid-40s. He often invited me to drink tea with him by a carved teak-tree table in his company office. From Eastern China's Henan Province, Zhou presented himself as a sort of Confucian intellectual, and told me he subscribes to four cardinal values that comprise Han Chinese character or spirit: Benevolence (*renyi*), etiquette (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and genuineness (*xin*). "We Chinese do not work as individuals, my company is like a family", he said one evening. "I am like a tree with many branches". Zhou demonstrated by clinching his fist. "In the West, you are individuals", he said, and put his five fingers on the table. The principle was that a close-knit network of (fictive) family members, symbolised by the closed fist, is stronger than an assembly of individuals, as symbolised by five fingers standing alone. "We Han Chinese help and teach the ethnic minorities", Zhou continued, "but some of them are very closed-minded. They have a lot of resources, but they don't know how to use them".

Zhou often complained that locals in Ruili 'don't have culture', referring to an idealised Han Chinese high culture more so than to everyday practice. He often cited writings of Chinese philosophers, and said that he is a social scientist. Although Zhou does not hold a university degree, he said he has studied with a teacher in Beijing, and took it upon him to lecture me about Ruili. "Locals here are lazy", he said, "but I hire locals so they can learn about business, and how to develop their thinking". Initially, Zhang admired Zhou, and I often found her reading a book he had given her. The

book was a sort of manual in self-development and how to manage business relations in China.

Zhou's narratives almost invariably began with him arriving broke in Ruili, and then proceeded with him working his way up the local business hierarchy with perseverance. Zhou first acquired a license from the provincial headquarters in Kunming to be the sole supplier of the Danish beer brand Carlsberg in Ruili, and then expanded with other imported beer, wine, and liquor brands. Soon he had employed a handful of staff, and then opened a bar in Ruili. It was not until I did an in-depth interview with Zhou that he told me about his gold mining venture at the Yuanyang Mountains. His friend had opened a mine without official permissions, and Zhou hired local ethnic Hani people as miners. But after a conflict, the workers had mutinied against him, and taken over the mine. Zhou did not specify the nature of the conflict or its aftermath.

Zhou planned an official opening of the bar in Ruili, and asked for my participation. With Zhang, I arranged a cocktail party. Zhou invited the bosses of some of Ruili's KTVs and nightclubs, and made me give the opening speech and be DJ for the party. I was told that one cannot open a nightclub or KTV in Ruili without the approval of 'big bosses' (*da laoban*) and black society (*hei shehui*) engaged in this industry. Zhou needed to make guanxi with key players in Ruili's entertainment industry to avoid them seeing him as an illegitimate competitor, and using a foreigner as an exotic face of the bar seemed a way for him to project his extensive social connections.

There was a high staff turnover at the bar, and most staff was between 17 and 21 years old. A backpacker from Beijing came by and worked there for some months before moving on, as did a drifter from the Xinjiang Province. A 17-year-old local ethnic Dai girl worked in the bar for two months, but Zhou fired her, because she often called him and asked about how to do things at the bar. He did not pay her for the time she worked there. Zhang and a few other young girls worked at the bar every night, often until 3 in the morning. Zhou owned 40 per cent of the bar, while Zhang and another young local girl each owned 30 per cent. But Zhou appropriated all the profits. Zhou never actually worked at the bar, but came by every night to drink beer. He never paid for anything he consumed. After a year, the bar was closed down with a deficit.

It was hard to access Zhou's personal story, feelings, and opinions. Conversely, I experienced a direct connection with Zhang and Wang. Through them, I saw a different image of Zhou. "I don't want to give you a bad impression of Zhou", Wang

once said. “Deep inside, I don’t think he is a bad person. But Wang is not happy. He does not communicate with the heart. He talks, but he doesn't listen. It is hard for him to get close to people”. I thought about how Zhou often raised his glass in a toast, saying, “To happiness”. But Zhou did not look happy when he made that toast for happiness.

One evening, Wang came my room. He looked tired. I asked him how he was, and he talked for three hours. He told me about the disappearance of Zhang’s money from Zhou’s company account and his work to retrieve it. Zhou blamed Wang for the company account being empty. Zhou had not paid Wang his salary for months, and said Wang must pay off his debt. Zhou threatened that his black society friends would cut off Wang’s arm and leg. He also called people in Wang’s village in Yuanyang and told them Wang had stolen money from him. Finally, he threatened to hurt Wang’s family if he did not pay off the debt or if he told anybody that Zhou’s company had no money.

“I want to leave the company”, Wang said, “but Zhou will not let me go. I know too much about his business. Zhou has big problems. He borrowed more than one million *Yuan* from different loan sharks. But each of them does not know that Zhou borrowed money from other loan sharks”. Zhou seemed engaged in a dangerous game, borrowing money from one loan shark to pay off debts to another loan shark, and so on. Wang said the loan sharks were black society. He told me Zhou owed 600.000 *Yuan* to the owner of a KTV in Ruili, and the KTV owner had threatened to cut off Zhou’s hand if he did not pay back the money within a week. Desperate, Zhou had asked a local feicui trader for help. This man went to the KTV owner and said: “Cutting off Zhou’s hand will not give you back your money. Wait a bit, I will give you a nice feicui stone. You can keep it until Zhou pays back the money”. Feicui could thus serve as collateral for debts in underground economies in Ruili. “Zhou even borrowed 300.000 *Yuan* from his sister”, Wang continued, “but he didn't pay back the money, and his sister lost her house”. A few months earlier, Wang’s wife came to work in Zhou’s company. Zhou had promised to pay her 1500 *Yuan* per month to clean and cook, but had not paid her yet. Wang had worked hard for many months, and was going to make his first trip home for the Chinese New Year. “I cannot even afford to buy clothes for my children”, Wang lamented. Also Zhou’s threats had gotten to him: “I am not afraid of Zhou, I am a man”, he said, “but Zhou says he will send black society people to my village to hurt my family, so what can I do?”

Wang's account of Zhou's borrowing-spree made me think about an incident, where Zhou tried to use me as a voucher for his creditworthiness in the black loan market in Ruili. That night Zhou asked me to come to his office. When I arrived, Zhou was seated by the tea table opposite a young guy. The young guy started asking me questions: For how long had I known Zhou? How did I know him, and how would I characterise our relationship? What was I doing in Ruili? For how long would I stay? What was my job, and how much did I earn? I got an unpleasant vibe from the guy, and started asking him questions in return: Where was he from, and what did he do here in Ruili? I received vague answers, and only learned that the young guy is from the Hunan Province.

The Hunan guy questioned Zhou about his alcohol business. Zhou talked about his many clients and the characteristics of different kinds of imported alcohol brands, while adding cultural capital to his persona with classical Chinese idioms and sayings. He seemed to enchant the young guy. A friend of Zhou's arrived. The Hunan guy asked him similar questions to those he had asked me, and jotted down the replies in a notebook. Dressed in sports clothing and with gold chains on his wrist and neck, he had the air of a mafia guy. He had a habit of picking out blackheads from his facial skin, and then examining them before letting them fall to the ground. That habit annoyed the hell out of me.

Out of the blue, Zhou told the Hunan guy that he and I were going to open a bar together. As we had no such agreement, I said, "yes, Zhou will give me the money, and I manage the bar". Zhou laughed, but the young guy replied gravely, "but Zhou doesn't have any money, that's the problem". Zhou said that he had encountered problems in his company, and that some staff had stolen money from him. I did not catch the whole sentence, but Zhou mentioned Wang and Zhang. I was getting fed up, and said I was tired and wanted to go home. The Hunan guy offered to drive me.

On the way back to my hotel, the Hunan guy stopped the car, turned to me and asked: "What do you think about Zhou?" I tried to state my position as subtly but clearly as possible: "I really don't know him well enough to tell", I replied. The young man pressed the issue: "Do you think Zhou is a good guy or a bad guy"? I again replied, "I don't know Zhou well enough to say", and continued, "but I know Zhang and Wang well, and I think they are good people. Do you understand what I mean?" This was a subtle way to dissociate myself from Zhou, and thus undermine his attempt to use me to back up his creditworthiness. Zhou had clearly told the Hunan guy that he and I were close friends, and the Hunan guy's inquiry into my earnings indicated that I could be held accountable if Zhou failed to pay back the loan. Zhou

had associated Zhang and Wang with losses in his company, and me saying they were good people undermined the trustworthiness of that statement. The Hunan guy nodded and said, “I understand what you mean”.

As I told Wang about that incident back in my hotel room, he said Zhou had attempted to borrow 500.000 *Yuan* from the Hunan guy, who represented a black society of loan sharks from the Hunan Province. He also said that Zhou had asked him do things that he felt were wrong in his heart. A previous employee had allegedly stolen money from the company. Zhou had asked Wang to kidnap this man to Myanmar, tie him up and steal his passport, in order to make him pay up. Wang had declined, and the employee disappeared. A few days later, Zhou asked Wang to come by his office. Suddenly he had hit Wang in the face twice, and said Wang did not do his job well. Wang accepted the blows, because his wife was with him in Ruili. Wang worked 16 hours per day, and was exhausted. At night, he could not sleep, because he was thinking about how to escape. “Zhou can manipulate me, because I am not local”, he said, “but he is afraid to harm Zhang, because her family is from Ruili. He is afraid to mess with the locals. I am from the village, my wife doesn't speak Chinese, she only speaks Hani language. What can we do against Zhou? He has guanxi here”.

Wang and I agreed to meet with Zhang in my hotel room later, when Guoguo arrived in Ruili. Wang brought along his wife, and he told Guoguo what he had told me. The pressing issue was how to retrieve Wang’s and his wife’s money, and let them leave the company safely. I suggested that Guoguo and I talked to Zhou. I knew that Zhou cared about our image of him, as he had spent much effort presenting himself to us as a morally solid man. The fact that we were both outsiders allowed Zhou greater agency in projecting a self-image to us that differed from the image people he had cheated or hurt had of him. But Wang said he did not want us to confront Zhou, who would then know that Wang had told on him. “Then it will end bloody”, Wang said.

I wondered what had happened to the money Zhou had borrowed. Wang mentioned one business scheme. Zhou had learned that a water buffalo sold for 2000 *Yuan* in Myanmar, but could fetch 10.000 *Yuan* in China. With a partner, Zhou bought 1000 water buffaloes in Myanmar. Aided by an associate of an influential mafia boss in Ruili, Zhou got the water buffaloes through the Myanmar-China border. But the cargo got stopped at a checkpoint that marks the border of Dehong Prefecture. The water buffalos had not been registered or cleared, and Zhou had to send them back. Wang did not know how much money Zhou lost, but given that 1000 water buffalos at 2000 *Yuan* per animal makes 2 million *Yuan*, plus

transportation costs, Wang thought the loss was substantial. Zhou also seemed to be engaged in other business schemes in Myanmar. He showed me a catalogue advertising an industrial and commercial zone outside Mandalay. He said he would go there to meet some 'overseas Chinese' partners from Myanmar, and consider if he should invest in some business there.

Zhou's trip to Myanmar allowed Wang and his wife to escape from Ruili. Zhou's trip to Myanmar coincided with my departure from Ruili. Two days after Zhou left and the day after I left, Wang and his wife went home. A week later, a car with four men stopped in front of Wang's house in the village. They were black society people sent by Zhou, and told Wang to pay them 300.000 *Yuan*. Wang's wife invited them inside to drink tea. At this point, Wang phoned his friends in the village and told them to come to his house. Wang's father had two riffles for shooting birds and four dynamite sticks used for gold mining. As Wang went upstairs to get the weapons, the black society people rushed to the car and left the village. Wang did not hear from Zhou or his associates again.

> At Wang's home in the mountain village in Yuanyang, I open a bottle of French red wine that I brought from Kunming for an occasion like this, and Wang and I talk.
>
> Wang heard that Zhou left Ruili and has set up a company in Gejiu, not far from here. Zhou's company recruits and leases out workers for construction of the new highway. Wang is happy to be in the village, but he worries about his wife, who is alone in Guangzhou, some 1.300 kilometres east of here. She works as a sewing machinist in a factory that makes bags, and earns 9 Yuan per hour, amounting to around 2.500 Yuan per month. It is not a lot of money, and she has a hard time, because she does not speak Chinese or Cantonese. If she did, she could ask for a higher salary or find a better job. Wang recently came back to the village after working for three months as a mango picker in the island of Hainan with a friend.
>
> Before that, Wang was in Guangzhou with his wife. They both worked in a construction company, building housing. Between them they earned around 12.000 Yuan monthly. But the contractor, a local man from the Honghe Prefecture, still owes them 60.000 Yuan. Wang says the contractor is broke and he cannot get back his money now. Police cannot help in matters like these. Wang had planned to use the salary to start up a business raising organic chicken. Wang's wife will keep her job in Guangzhou until Wang has set up a sustainable business. Wang has two younger sisters, and had to work from a young age to put them through school. Now, his sisters

live in other villages with their own families, and it is Wang's responsibility to take care of his parents. His mother has dyspnoea and his father is crippled by rheumatism, and cannot work. The family is self-sufficient in food, but Wang's parents need medicine, so Wang and his wife need to bring in cash. Wang's youngest daughter and his son live with them in the village, while his oldest daughter lives with his sister and attends school in another town.

Almost all young people in the village have been traveling away to do manual labour in urban Eastern China. Mr Li, the administrative village leader, just came back from a three months work trip to Guangzhou, Fuzhou, and Wuhan. "Manual work is very bitter", he says, "I usually work in construction, but I take any work I can get. We work many hours and are very tired. I send half of my salary to my family, and spend the other half on the travels. I earned around 10.000 Yuan every month; it's a good salary". Li was in the military for many years, where he was trained as a medic. He has around 1000 tea trees on mountains plots surrounding the village. The tea features an earthy, slightly bitter taste. He sells the tealeaves to buyers from the city of Puer, who market it as Puer tea, which has become a famous brand name after a sharp rise in demand from especially Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Taiwan took off in the early 2000s. The buyers ferment the leaves before drying them, thereby materially-conceptually transforming them from 'raw tea' (sheng cha) to 'cooked tea' (shu cha). Some buyers from Beijing and Guangzhou came to the village, but he does not want to sell to them: "Their heart is not clean", Li says. "Us ethnic minorities, our hearts are clean, but people from the cities try to cheat us, they offer very low prices. We sell to middlemen here in Yunnan, people we have guanxi with. Some tea we don't want to sell, we just drink it ourselves. Our tea is like Chinese medicine, it's good for the health".

Li supplements his earnings from manual labour, cultivation of tea and other crops and an army pension with a salary from his job as administrative village leader. For that position he had to become a member of the Communist Party. He proudly shows me posters in the village of Xi Jinping, whom he characterises as 'China's third great leader' after Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Li's family is one of the most prosperous in this village of 79 households. They live in a newly constructed three-floors house next to the new, asphalted road. Unlike most local houses, his features hot and cold running water, a refrigerator, and a washing machine, and he also bought a car. Li speaks enthusiastically about the new road and the construction of new houses alongside it, which began around seven years ago. The local government urges villagers to build new

houses here, and provides economic supplements, usually ranging between 10.000 and 90.000 Yuan per household. This does not cover the costs of materials, and the household can borrow the rest of the money in the bank. Many households have thus become indebted, and Wang says this is why young people leave the village to work in big cities.

Wang takes me to the old village downhill, where he grew up. The village is abandoned now as villagers built new houses closer to the new road. But Wang feels the housing and environment in the old village was better than their current housing. Even the village site for ritual worship has been relocated uphill, closer to the new road. Modernisation projects like road construction thus not only create debts that induce parents to leave their children in the village to labour in cities, but also manifest efficacies of state policies on how Hani people in this village construct the cosmological-material topography of the mountain they reside on.

## Ethnographic Representation

I draw three lessons from this ethnographic account. First, the relationship between Zhou and Wang highlights unequal power relations and economic opportunities between Han Chinese and ethnic minorities. As a Han Chinese, Zhou had easier access to valuable guanxi relations than Wang, which allowed Zhou to position himself as a middleman between mining companies and ethnic miners in Yuanyang, between alcohol companies and clients in Ruili, and between construction companies and labourers in Gejiu. From northeast China, Zhou speaks 'standard' (*biaozhun*) Chinese, which some Yunnanese associated with Chinese high culture. To this he added the cultural capital of a studied repertoire of Chinese idioms. Simply by talking, Zhou seemingly acquired loans worth millions of *Yuan* in Ruili. While there were gold deposits underneath Wang's family's plots, they did not have the connections and capital to exploit these fully. His family had done artisanal mining for years, but the output was low, and the local government had now closed down villagers' mining pits, while selling off concessions to companies with industrial machinery. As an ethnic mountain farmer, it was not easy for Wang to create guanxi in Ruili, and his wife did not speak Chinese, which translated as a lower salary in her jobs. While the administrative village leader, Mr Li, had prospered in recent years, modernisation

projects made villagers enter into debt, which induced many to leave their children behind in the village to do manual labour in eastern China.

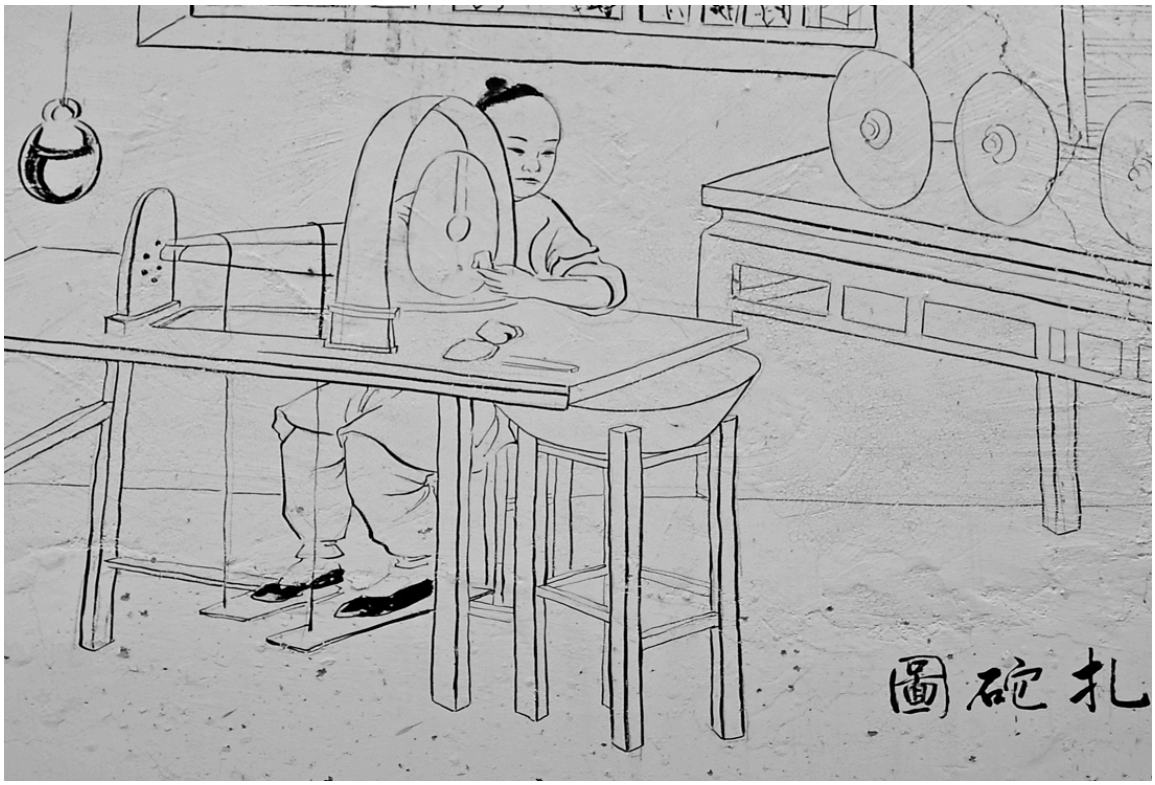
Some ethnic people I met in Yunnan felt that Han Chinese take advantage of their 'clean hearts', as Li put it. In Yuanyang, we went to a downhill waterfall for a picnic. Here, Li walked into a bamboo hut and asked the family for some salt and a machete to cut bamboo. The family gave him the articles, alongside a lump of smoked pork. Li did not know the family, which is ethnic Miao. He said it is custom on the mountain to provide visitors with what they need, regardless of ethnicity. This highland 'sharing mentality' operates on different exchange logic than market relations in lowland cities dominated by Han Chinese. Zhou had lived in Wang's house in Yuanyang when he was broke. Wang might have expected to be similarly treated as a guest of Zhou's in Ruili. But instead Zhou hired Wang and his wife as low-paid manual workers, withheld their salaries, and threatened Wang to keep him compliant in an environment where neither legal, nor social sanctions were at Wang's disposal. Zhou was skilled at drawing people into his network and using them instrumentally, as his attempt to use me as a 'face' for acquiring a loan in Ruili's black moneylending market exemplifies. Zhou's businesses manifest a 'wild capitalism' that flourishes in the context of a lack of strict enforcement of regulations and is perhaps now most pronounced in border area margins of reform-era China.

Secondly, fieldwork can involve encountering activities considered immoral or illegal, and sympathies or antipathies towards informants can influence how ethnographers conceptualise, convey, or even engage in such activities. Alice Goffman's (2014) discussion of the impact of incarceration and policing on low-income African-American urban communities in Philadelphia engendered accusations that she had "participated in a serious felony in the course of her field work" (Lubet 2015). One of Goffman's informants was shot dead by a rival gang member, and she volunteered as a driver during armed expeditions to revenge the murder. This involvement, Lubet argues, "constituted conspiracy to commit murder under Pennsylvania law". Ethnographic research is often divided between studying with 'a view from below' (Thomson 1968) and 'studying up' (Nader 1972 [1964]). Ethnographers may naturally develop sympathies for marginalised informants. Sympathy seems to have drawn Goffman into what Lubet characterises as 'conspiracy to commit murder'. But also ethnographers 'studying up' are drawn into informants' lives. If not for my friendship with Wang, I might not have seen through Zhou's intensions during the meeting with the loan shark, and could have been drawn into this economic relation in a manner the consequences of which are hard to predict.

When I first met Zhou, I was ensnared by his manners and eagerness to debate issues beyond the quotidian. John Osburg (n.d.) notes how ethnographic research with elites like wealthy Chinese businessmen, civil servants and gangsters presents the risk of 'ethnographic seduction'; a term he borrows from Antonius Robben (1996), who interviewed military officers responsible for violence during Argentina's 'dirty war'. Robben (p. 97) argues, "anthropologists want to be seduced because it gives them the desired feeling of gaining access to a hidden world", but that "seduction prevents interviewers from probing the discourse of the interviewee and, instead, makes them lose their critical stance toward the manifest discourse" (cited in Osburg). Engaging with Ruili's jade trading elite carried a risk of ethnographic seduction that could hamper critical inquiries into controversial aspects of their business. This danger of legitimating elite self-representations should induce reflexivity. Through my friendship with Wang, my perception of Zhou changed from sympathy to antipathy. While ethnographers and informants may not get along, ethnographers are often reluctant to write about dislike (Sjöberg 2011: 15). A similar point can be made about money in fieldwork (Senders and Truitt 2007). Westerners often see money as morally suspicious in intimate relations like friendship, and ethnographers like to think informants interact with us, because they like us. But as Wang's economic strategizing shows, informants may also use ethnographers for monetary gains, for example as 'faces' for acquiring underground loans (see also Truitt 2007).

Finally, I emphasise that the account above mainly represents Wang's perspective, and is one account of many possible ones. Initiating this chapter, I proposed a view upon ethnographic data as interactively formed singular configurations, from which the ethnographer identifies wider processes. My interactions with Wang over time and in different places created information and sympathy, which made me convey his perspective here. I have attempted to identify wider processes from this assemblage of information, including Han//minority power dynamics and local effects of state-sponsored development in Yunnan. In its challenging of dominant narratives about the CCP bringing positive development to marginal borderlands, Wang's voice is representative of some ethnic minority peoples I engaged with in Yunnnan. With large-scale infrastructural projects and new digital technologies, people in Yunnan are now being connected to, and imagining the Chinese nation-state in new ways. As Wang's story underlines, access to state-promoted spectres of economic and social mobility, as coined in Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream', is highly stratified and fraught with struggles and sacrifices for some ethnic minority peoples.

7. View on the Shan Hills in Myanmar from China's Dehong Prefecture. Photo by the author.



8. Jade carving operated with foot pedals and a rotating disc. Mural from Hehua, a village outside Tengchong.

# 3. Opacity: The Myanmar-China Jade Trade

> [E]ach gemstone making its passage from the depths of the earth to the heights of fashion carries a pedigree that may be remarkably similar to that of its ancestors. It might well have begun commercial life in mines that are either illegal per se or, if legal, rife with theft; crossed borders in smugglers' pouches; come briefly into daylight again in cutting and polishing centers whose practitioners grant themselves a tax exemption; reentered underground freight channels through deals done in cash and sealed with a handshake; and arrived in a marketing nexus replete with commercial fraud. En route it might have passed through the hands of impoverished diggers and backwoods traders, aspiring warlords and corrupt bureaucrats, intelligence agents and insurgents, gunrunners and mercenaries, professional smugglers and black-market money-changers, drug-money launderers […] before coming to rest around an elegant neck or a languorously beckoning finger […] All this, of course, assumes that the gemstone is what it seems – although in reality it might well be oiled to hide cracks, irradiated to change color, flux treated to fill fissures, grown in a modern crystal lab, or totally faked.
>
> - Thomas Naylor, *The Underworld of gemstones*, p. 133-134

As Naylor vividly describes, gemstones are often protagonists in illegal economies. While to a great extent an opaque economy, the value of the Myanmar-China feicui trade is by all accounts immense.

Researchers from London-based NGO Global Witness (2015) estimated the value of jade production in Myanmar in 2014 to have been as much as US$ 31 billion, a figure that equates 48 per cent of Myanmar's official GDP and is 46 times government expenditure on health that year (ibid: 6). Meanwhile, Harvard University's Ash Center in 2013 estimated the value to be US$ 8 billion a year and in 2016 estimated the value to be US$ 15 billion. Official jade production in Myanmar dropped abruptly from 2011 – the year fighting between the KIA and the Tatmadaw resumed – and remained low in 2013 and 2014. But average per-kilogram prices of

unprocessed jade officially exported to China were exceptionally high in 2014, and the total value of jade export to China increased tenfold from 2013 to 2014, while in 2015 official jade production soared, but prices and exports to China dropped. We thus cannot assume the 2014 Global Witness estimate of jade production value representative for a longer timespan. Global Witness used data about the quantity of jade that was sold in the official emporiums organised by Myanmar Gem Enterprises (MGE) from 2005 to 2014. After each emporium, an official press release announces the quantity and value of jade sold. This data shows the total amount bid by buyers, which means that the buyer has paid a 5 per cent deposit of the bid for a lot, but may not have paid the remaining sum to complete the purchase. Myanmar Gem Enterprises provided data to Openjadedata.org, which shows that the amount of jade fully paid for can be much lower than the amount bid for. The Global Witness figure may thus be too high. Traders may place high bids without completing the transaction to drive up prices for their own jade. Also, unpaid jade does not enter the official market that year, which can create a perception of scarcity and thus raise prices for the traders' own stock of similar stones. Recalculating the data, Openjadedata.org estimates the value of official jade sales in 2014 at US$ 6.3 to 6.6 billion, but crucially this figure does not include jade bypassing the official emporiums, which by many accounts is the majority.[16] Unlicensed and unregistered mining, undervaluation and underreporting, smuggling, opaque trade networks and transactions, and vast price rises from mines to end consumers make up for a patchwork of blind spots that renders it impossible to assess how much money change hands in the feicui industry. But the total value must be much higher than the Openjadedata estimate.

This chapter presents a history of the Myanmar-China feicui trade, and discusses some practices, experiences, and consequences of the contemporary industry, including its relation to armed conflict, drug trade, and HIV. Finally, the chapter presents cases from three different nodes in the commodity chain. First, we examine a fluctuating gem trade in the Kachin State capital of Myitkina. The second case outlines a stratified market scene Mandalay. Thirdly, based on interviews in Shanghai, I discuss how aspects of the biographies of feicui pieces have often been 'filtered out' before they reach end consumers. Knowledge is one of the most valuable assets in the feicui trade, but it is configured and distributed differentially in different sites. The three cases illustrate how 'opacity' - deriving from illegality, distance,

[16] See https://openjadedata.org/Stories/how_much_jade_worth.html for Openjadedata.org's calculation of jade value in Myanmar.

borders, alterity, dominant narratives, and the materiality of feicui - generate different opportunities, experiences, and imaginations in different nodes of the feicui commodity chain. With Proctor's (2008) concept of 'agnotology', I propose attention to both the production and productivity of lack of knowledge in the feicui commodity chain.

## A History of the Myanmar-China Jade Trade

Feicui has connected people and places in the Myanmar-Yunnan borderlands for centuries. Its introduction to China is not clearly dated, but a legend has it that feicui was imported by coincidence on one of the caravan routes that made up the Ancient Tea Horse Road (*chamagudao*), also referred to as the Southwest Silk Road, which linked Yunnan with Southeast Asia, Sichuan, Tibet, Nepal, and India. According to the legend, a muleteer picked up a stone and put it in his saddlebag as a counterweight to his cargo. Back in Yunnan, the stone fell to the ground and broke, disclosing green colour inside.[17]

One way to conceptualise the Myanmar-Yunnan borderlands is as 'contact zones', a term that Pratt (1991: 34) defines as "social spaces where cultures meet, cloth, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power". Pratt's (p. 38) argument about how the powerful definition of legitimate linguistic interaction segregates its opposite is also relevant in thinking about the Myanmar-Yunnan borderlands. Chang (2014: 12) notes that the 'borderland' has often been associated with periphery, wasteland, backwardness, and lawlessness, in contrast to ideas of center, civilization, progress, and law and order. Such ideas, which underlie state-building and stress national sovereignty and national boundaries, have been challenged by a literature on liminal borderlands relating to gender, marginal people, culture, migration, environment, and underground trade (ibid: 13). Van Schendel and De Maaker (2014: 1) likewise point to how a new interest in the study of Asia's borderlands is "based on a sense that state-centered views hamper our understanding of social dynamics in broader regional fields", while Tsing (1994) explores 'margins' as a "conceptual site from which to explore the imaginative quality and the specificity of local/global cultural formation" (ibid: 1). This premise has guided numerous 'non-

[17] The legend seems first to have been first reported by Mr Warry of the Chinese Consular Service, as quoted in *Burma Gazetteer: Myitkina District* (1912) (cited in Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 2).

statecentric' conceptualizations of borderland spaces between India and China.[18] Van Schendel's (2018) distinction between 'structured', 'liquid', 'spatial', and 'sensory' metaphors conceptualizing these spaces in recent scholarship offers a useful review. Of particular pertinence is a focus on how notions of licit, illicit, legal, and illegal are mobilised (Abraham and van Schendel 2005), as both state, and nonstate actors profit differentially from engagenments in different nodes of the feicui commodity chain.

Giersch (2011: 48) argues that the circulation of "goods, ideas, technologies, and religion between Yunnan and Burma can be found at least as early as the third century B.C.E", and B. Yang (2009: 14, 43, 49) notes that jade was transported on the so-called Southwest Silk Road, which functioned as early as from the second century B.C.E. [19] While Leach (1970: 238) mentions that Chinese works published between 350 A.D. and 1000 A.D. refer to production of jade in what was likely the Kachin Hills, Sun (2011: 204) suggests that it was the invading Mongols, who by introducing gemstones from Western Asia to China in the 13th Century jump-started a Chinese demand for Burmese gems that was and still is the driving force behind the gem business in Myanmar. The Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) trade with Burma was centered on rubies and sapphires (*baoshi*; 'gemstones'), but an emerging significance of feicui in Qing Dynasty China (1644-1912) is manifest in the replacement of the term baoshi by feicui in court records, which Sun (p. 203) dates to the year 1719. But feicui did not leave a strong impact in China until the late 18th Century. Having conquered Xinjiang, the Qing Emperor Qianlong, who reigned from 1735 to 1795, started to extract nephrite jade from the area around Hetian. Inflicted with an obsession with jade, Qianglong wrote more than 600 poems about jade, which were inscribed into jade, often ancient pieces.[20] Qianlong heard about an emerald-green, translucent jade emanating from *Mien Tien* (now Myanmar), which had last sent tribute to China in 1567, and waged war against its King Bodawpaya, who in 1788 dispatched three envoys carrying feicui to Qianlong (Levy and Scott-Clark 2001: 39). Rooted in its use as tribute to the Chinese Emperor, some Chinese still refer to the revered emerald-green colour of top-grade feicui as 'Imperial Green' (*diwang lü*). A foreign commodity, feicui was localised by incorporating it into the

[18] These include Van Schendel's (2002) 'Zomia'; Sadan's (2013) 'borderworlds'; Yü's (2017) 'multistate margins'; and B. Yang's (2009) 'frontier process'.

[19] Based on Luce and Pe Maung Tin (1939), Edmund Leach ([1954] 1970: 238) suggests that there are indications that an overland trade route from China to India passing through the Kachin Hills was established as early as 128 BC.

[20] In one case, "An 8000-year-old disc-shaped *bi*, a Chinese instrument used by emperors in the annual Temple of Heaven ceremony, was transformed into a desktop screen and graffitied with Qianlong's verse" (Levy & Scott-Clark 2001: 16).

generic category of jade (*yu*). Leach (p. 241) writes that the jade mines were first 'extensively developed' during the 18th century, and it seems reasonable that the use of feicui as Imperial tribute would lead to an upscaling of mining.

By 1798, a well-established route existed for transporting feicui from the Kachin hills to China, and with some alterations in the original route, the 'Jade Road' from Hpakant operated until WWII (Hughes *et. al.*: 2). In 1888, W. Warry wrote that the years 1831 to 1840 was the period of "greatest prosperity" in the jade trade: "All the stones were sent […] to Yunnanfu [Kunming], at this time the great emporium of the trade. The business there was mainly in the hands of Cantonese merchants, who bought the rough stone in large quantities and carried it back to be cut and polished at Canton [Guangdong]" (cited in Hughes n.d.). As I have noted, Cantonese are still strongly involved in feicui carving and trade today. Previously controlled by different Kachin warlords, Chinese and Shan consortiums controlled most mining pits by the early 1900s (Levi and Scott-Clark 2001: 198). The Dowager Empress Cixi, who effectively controlled the Chinese Qing government from 1861 until her death in 1908 developed an appetite for jade matching that of Qianlong. By 1875, Cixi had a steady supply of feicui, and she ordered a treasure hall to store it. But people from the court stole jade pieces. In the *hutong* lanes outside the Tiananmen gate in Peking, shops emerged that exported cases of jade to London, Paris and New York, feeding an international market kickstarted by the Allied plunder of the Forbidden City in 1860 (ibid: 156). In the 1920s and 1930s, feicui jewellery was highly treasured among socialites in Shanghai, London, and Paris (ibid: 224, 237).

Chiang-Kai Shek, leader of China's nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) Party, had looted Cixi's citadel at the Imperial necropolis and Peking's Imperial Warehouse for feicui, which he moved to Taiwan as the KMT lost the Chinese civil war to the communists. After the communist takeover in China in 1949, demand for feicui withered in Mainland China. In January 1950, KMT forces isolated in Yunnan crossed the Burma border and established bases in the Shan state. From Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek orchestrated his units to strike at China's communist troops, and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supplied them with weapons (ibid: 283). The KIA bought such CIA-supplied weapons from the KMT in exchange for feicui, which was often resold in Hong Kong (ibid: 284). In Burma's socialist period (1962-1988), much feicui was transported via the Shan State to markets in northern Thailand, which catered especially to buyers from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Chang 2004, 2014; Frey and Lintner 1991). Among others, Khun Sa, a Chinese Shan, who headed the Shan United Army and operated a drug cartel from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s,

guided feicui caravans to Thailand in exchange for feicui (Levi and Scott-Clark: 284). The KIA formed a feicui company, and used the profits to arm soldiers to combat the Burmese army under Ne Win, to construct schools, and to build field hospitals (ibid: 288). They sold licenses to Chinese mine operators and taxed stones, while keeping the best mines under KIA control. Meanwhile, feicui was becoming a 'bankable commodity' in the West and in 1984 Sotheby's in London held a feicui auction, which included a necklace that had belonged to the Dowager Empress Cixi (ibid: 291). When China eased border restrictions in the early 1990s, most transport of feicui shifted back to overland routes in the Myanmar-Yunnan borderlands, and Ruili became the main entry port for feicui import to China.

A 1994 ceasefire agreement betweeen the KIA and the Burmese junta was followed by the latter's takeover and selling of natural resources in Kachin State, including jade mining concessions, to military cronies, Chinese companies, and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which was a primary factor in the breakdown of the ceasefire in 2011. Observers have also pointed to corruption, drug trade, HIV infection, environmental degradation, and dangerous working conditions in the feicui industry. The Global Witness (2015) report *Jade: Myanmar's "big state secret"* is based on meetings and correspondence with over 400 officials, industry representatives and community members in Myanmar and China (ibid: 22-23). It describes how an opague network of companies linked to the military and its cronies, ethnic armed groups, drug syndicates, and Chinese businessmen control the feicui industry, while miners and the local population have experienced detrimental consequences. For example, a landslide in November 2015 was reported to have killed 113 feicui miners and left around 100 others missing the next day and another landslide to have killed at least 15 miners in July 2018.[21] Steven Law of the Kachin Development Networking Group characterised the industry thus: "There's large-scale environmental destruction, people have lost their land, [there is] a lack of jobs day by day, danger for miners around mining sites, and human rights violence by security guards, police and soldiers".[22]

Traders in Ruili told me feicui sales prices and volumes boomed especially from 2009, and hundreds of thousands of miners allegedly worked the feicui mines in 2016 and 2017.[23] This boom has occurred during Western sanctions targeting Myanmar's mining, timber, and gemstone sectors in reaction to the government's violent

[21] *Reuters* (23 November, 2015; 14 July 2018).
[22] *The Guardian* (25 February 2019).
[23] *Time* (9 March, 2017) and *Myanmar Times* (8 June 2016) both mention that 300.000 miners works at the jade mines in Kachin State.

suppression of the 2007 Saffron Revolution. In November 2007, the EU included a section on Burmese-origin gemstones in its common position towards Myanmar, and in July 2008, the US Congress adopted the 'Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE' (Junta's Anti-Democratic Effort), which was later signed into law by George W. Bush. The sanctions intended to emulate Africa's 'blood diamonds' model (Egreteau 2011). This market boom during Western sanctions emphasises the central role of Chinese demand in the industry.

## The Jade Trade Today: Emporiums, Taxation, and Transport

Currently, the only legal way for foreigners to buy unprocessed feicui in Myanmar and export it abroad is through the official emporiums organised by Myanmar Gem Enterprises; a state-owned enterprise responsible for regulating the gemstones sector and for production of gemstones through joint venture agreements with private companies. The gem emporiums are held in Yangon, Mandalay, or Naypyidaw, usually twice a year, but have been halted periodically due the war in Kachin State. While the government ban on exporting unprocessed stones not bought at the emporiums is posited as protecting the domestic industry, it is a way of monopolising mining licensing, trade, and taxation, and feicui is mostly exported as unprocessed stones, the added value of carving realized in China. Transportation routes can be divided into southern and northern routes, the latter most used today.

The southern route has two main branches. One branch sees feicui shipped out from Yangon, often to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Another branch sees feicui transported via the Shan state to northern Thailand. A Chinese-Burmese trader told me a 12 per cent of estimated value must be paid on jade imported to Thailand. One way to avoid this tax for small-scale traders is to set cabochons in temporary brass rings, which transporters wear as jewellery when crossing the Myanmar-Thai border. With the reopening of direct transport from Kachin State to Yunnan, Thai markets for high-quality feicui declined from the 1990s, but some low-grade jewellery markets flourish due to a recent massive influx of Mainland Chinese tourists. A descendant of a KMT soldier in the northern Thai village of Doi Pui told me he buys feicui jewellery in Mandalay, smuggles it into Thailand via Mae Sai, and sells it to Chinese tourists in Doi Pui. He finds the 'communist' Chinese tourists stingy, but his Chinese ethnicity and language give him a business advantage over ethnic Miao in the village.

Feicui is sometimes graded into *utility*, *commercial*, and *imperial* grade. Most feicui I examined in Thailand was utility, and commercial grade 'souvenir jewellery' that rarely exceeded 10.000 *Yuan* per piece, whereas most Imperial grade materials go to markets in Yunnan and Guangdong.

The northern route also has two main branches, both of which go directly from Myanmar to China. With the opening of Myanmar-China border crossings in the early 1990s and a shift of demand from Hong Kong towards the mainland, the gravity of feicui transport routes shifted towards the northern overland routes, and the importance of Yangon and Chiang Mai as transit stations decreased (Frey and Lindtner 1991: 271). A southern branch of the northern route sees feicui transported to Mandalay and then via the Shan state to Ruili on the old Burma Road. The reviving of the Mandalay-Ruili route has been a driving force for Ruili's economic development, and many of Ruili's Chinese traders drive on this road to Mandalay to buy feicui. They usually pay professional carriers to freight the stones back to Ruili. The carriers pay bribes at government checkpoints en route, but there is a risk that untaxed stones might be confiscated (Chang 2011: 468). Carriers also hide high-quality feicui stones between cheaper ones. While a Chinese customs officer in Jiegao told me all incoming goods are checked and taxed, several traders said they can bribe customs officers to avoid or reduce taxes. Constructing infrastructure for taxed goods, the Myanmar and China governments also facilitate shadow economies operating through this infrastructure. With the completion in 2016 of highways between Ruili and Hangzhou, 2900 kilometres east, feicui can now be transported fast to China's east coast.

Traders in Ruili also buy stones from KIA-controlled mines. These are usually smuggled into Yunnan via northern routes of the northern branch that cross the border at, or close to Mahjiayang, Pianma, Gamwa, Gambaiji, Zhongmian, Tengchong, Laiza, Yinjiang, Longchuan, Nongdao, and Ruili. A Kachin jade trader in Ruili said Kachin smugglers, who navigate dirt paths on motorbikes to avoid road checkpoints, are called *ge li po* ('cart pushing man') in the Zaiwa Jingpo language. They are often paid around 200 *Yuan* per 1.5 kilograms of stone, but prices rise with the quality of the stones. Traders can usually sell such stones in Ruili cheaper than stones taxed by the Myanmar government. A trader in Ruili distinguished between taxation on the northern and southern routes thus: "Traders, who buy stones that go via Mandalay and Yangoon to Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand pay taxes to the Myanmar government. Traders, who buy stones that cross the Myanmar-China border pay taxes to the KIA. The tax on most stones here in Dehong has been

paid to the KIA. Many traders here have long-term relations with the Kachin". He said taxes can be included in the purchase price for KIA-controlled stones, but may also be levied at a KIA checkpoint before the Chinese border. Officially, China has agreed with the Myanmar government that Chinese businessmen should lease mines through the Myanmar Gem Enterprises and that traders should only buy stones taxed by the Myanmar government. But borderlanders on both sides of the border have forged business ties that bypass official agreements between states.

Kachin chiefs have granted mining concessions and taxed feicui for centuries, their authority in the field recognized by Burmese royal authorities (Sadan 2013: 93). The family of a Chinese-Burmese trader I interviewed leases government-controlled mines in Hpakant, but also pays 'underhand taxes' to the KIA, albeit she said the amount of these taxes is 'confidential'. In the case of diamonds, Naylor (2010) notes that insurgent groups often earn money through taxation: "The rebel groups manage through military power […] to impose import and export duties, license fees, transportation surcharges and, in some cases, direct bribes for particular officers" (ibid: 156). After taking control of the feicui mines in 1963, the KIA centralized Kachin taxation, while different ethnic armed groups have taxed and transported feicui in the Shan state (Chang 2011: 468-469; Frey and Lindtner 1991: 270). While illegal according to Myanmar government laws, stones that are not taxed or only taxed by the KIA are effectively legalized in China if subjected to import tax.

Several traders in Ruili said buyers of government-controlled stones in Myanmar must pay 33 per cent of their value in government tax for them to be transported legally to China. In 1934, H. L. Chibber likewise reported that jade stones could only leave Mogaung in Kachin State after paying an *ad valorem* royalty of 33 per cent to the Government Jade License (Chhibber 1934, in Hughes n.d.). Ruili's traders say a 34 per cent of sales value import tax is further levied at the Chinese border. Meanwhile, Global Witness (2015: 34) reports that Myanmar government authorities levy a 20 per cent tax after valuating stones at the mines. Companies should sell stones at the official gem emporium, but low-grade jade can also be sold legally at 'local' emporiums in Naypyidaw, Mandalay, or Yangon. Jade sold at the emporiums is then subject to a 10 per cent of sales price tax, after which it can be exported (ibid: 35). Global Witness thus lands total taxes in Myanmar at 30 per cent, divided into 20 per cent of estimated value and 10 per cent of sales value. *The Irrawaddy* (21 April, 2014) likewise lists taxes paid by mining companies at 30 per cent, but divided into 10 per cent of a winning bid on a concession, 10 per cent of the value of mined jade, and 10 per cent of earnings from emporium sales.

According to Global Witness (p. 34-36), mining companies must bribe different actors to secure a mining concession, while they employ a range of practices to evade or decrease taxes. First, a bribe must be paid to get the land surveyed in line with the Gemstone Law. Secondly, township officials, including the jade department, may need to be bribed. Thirdly, companies may also need to bribe the Tatmadaw Northern Commander (the top government army general in Kachin State), the Kachin State Chief Minister, or officials in Naypyidaw. An army general can be paid for securing a mining concession, and the general or one of his family members then gets a share in the mining company. You can also approach a well-connected company to act as your broker and apply for a license in its name. Aside from actors linked to the Myanmar military and government, the United Wa State Army was given lucrative mining contracts as part of the 1994 ceasefire agreement between the government and different ethnic insurgent armies.[24] Mining concessions are usually leased for three years at a time.

Comparing figures on jade production and emporium sales prices in 2014, Global Witness (p. 35) calculated a discrepancy of up to US$ 6 billion between the Myanmar government's actual tax income and what taxes could have generated that year. Companies often bribe officials to reduce or avoid the tax levied at the mines. During an expedition to the mines, W. Warry reported on under-valuing by official appraisers already in 1888: "The value of jade was determined for purposes of taxation by an official appraiser. This officer, however, by private arrangement with the traders and the Collector, estimated all stone about one-third of its real value" (cited in Hughes n.d.). A way of lowering taxes at the emporiums is to cut a window into a low-quality part of the stone, which sets the stone's taxable value at a fraction of its real value. The company's agents or proxies then secure the winning bid. Because the sales price is deflated, the tax paid is far lower than it should be. But having been taxed, the stone can be legally exported to China, where the company opens windows in the stone that display its most valuable parts, and sells it at a much higher price. An industry source estimated around 60 per cent of 2014 emporium sales involved vendors buying their own jade and that top companies use this method for around 80 per cent of the jade they sell (Global Witness: 35).

Undervaluation mainly applies to unprocessed stones and is facilitated by the opacity of their interior content, which is only gradually revealed when they are cut and carved in China. H.L. Chibber in 1934 reported that in the Kachin mining areas "the stones are not cut until after the Government royalty has been paid on them, and

[24] *The Guardian* (25 February, 2019).

therefore their real value is merely guess-work" (cited in Hughes n.d.). Naylor (2010: 146) similarly notes that Thai firms "export ruby while still in the rock matrix – that […] makes it easier for mine owners to undervalue the shipment for export-tax purposes". Sometimes, buyers who have stockpiled a certain type of jade win bids on similar stones at the emporiums, but do not pay and collect them. This enables them to restrict supply and command high prices for their own stones. Big companies typically sell high volumes of low-grade jade at the emporiums, alongside a token amount of good quality jade 'for show', whereas top-grade stones are smuggled. Traders interviewed by Global Witness researchers estimated that between 50 and 80 per cent of jade bypasses the emporiums and is smuggled untaxed to China (Global Witness 2015: 24).

Kevin Woods (2011a) uses the term 'ceasefire capitalism' to describe how the Myanmar government used the 1994 ceasefire agreement with the KIA to gain control over, and sell off Kachin natural resources, including jade mining concessions. I interviewed a retired government official in Ruili, who said control of the feicui mines is the primary cause for the re-eruption of fighting in 2011. He did feicui business in 1992-1993. The KIA controlled most mines then, and received taxes from traders and carriers. He said the government's takeover of mines intensified from 2008, and described 2009 to late 2013 as a period of spectacular price rises on feicui traded in China. The fighting from 2011 saw the Tatmadaw conquering new mines from the KIA, but also halted mining, and official jade production dropped from 43.2 million kilograms in the fiscal year 2011 to 15.1 million kilograms in 2013. In September 2014, the government allowed many mining companies to resume operations, and official jade production rose to 37.7 million kilograms in the fiscal year 2015.[25]

Having been paused due to the fighting, the gem emporium was held in Mandalay in mid-June 2013, with approximately 9.000 feicui lots on auction. An entrance ticket demands a 50.000 Euro deposit, and mainly Ruili's large-scale traders attended the emporium, while big traders in Guangzhou, Jieyang, Sihui, and Pingzhou in the Guangdong Province chartered six private planes to attend the emporium. For traders staying behind in Ruili, WeChat posts provided information about available stones and prices. Two traders in Ruili said feicui prices had increased by more than 30 per cent from February to May 2013, but that trade slowed down in June, as people waited to see how prices turned out at the emporium. If prices were very high in

[25] These figures are from Myanmar Statistial Information Service, as cited by Openjadedata.org (http://www.openjadedata.org/Stories/how_much_jade_worth.html)

Mandalay, Ruili's traders would hold on to their best stones in anticipation that prices would further increase. If prices were low, they would sell out of their stocks. Most traders I talked to in Ruili in June 2013 anticipated that prices would continue rising, one of them suggesting that "to invest in jade is now better than investing in real estate and gold".

Ruili's famous jade carver Wang Chaoyang attended the 2013 emporium. Wang posted a status update on WeChat: "People are crazy. But the heart of the stone never changes. It is the people who are fighting". The trader Mr Huang responded to his post: "You have to bring back a few good stones, ok?" Chinese jade traders in Ruili were obviously aware of the conflict in Kachin State, because it influenced supply and prices of feicui, and the fighting from 2011 induced scarcity of supply that led traders to except prices would continue rising. Wang's WeChat post contrasted the 'sincerity' and unchangeability of feicui to human conflicts and 'craziness' surrounding the trade. But the traders I talked to in Ruili did not articulate moral responsibility for the effects of their business in Kachin state.

**9.** A 174 tonnes feicui boulder found in Myanmar's Kachin State, valued at up to US$ 170 million. © SWNS.com

## Jade, Drugs, HIV, and Ethnic Minorities

Foreign visitors have described the feicui mining town Hpakant as a jungle boomtown teeming with vices. Located around 8 hours from the Kachin State capital

Myitkina, the mines can be flooded and inaccessible during the May to October Monsoon season, and there is malaria in the area. While local Shan dominate major towns and valleys and Kachin mostly inhabit the hills, Hughes *et. al.* (2005: 5) also met Chinese, Chin, Wa, Rakhine, Nepalese, and Panthay at the mines. The journalists Adrian Levi and Cathy Scott-Clark (2001) visited Hpakant in the 1990s, and reported on massive heroin use there. They went to a Chinese general store, where a customer would show his identity card, and the stop owner then stuck a syringe into his vein. The next customer had heroin injected with the same needle (ibid: 348). If customers needed more, self-service plastic bags filled with heroin solution "dangled from the rafters to which customers hooked themselves up, absorbing a few drops before passing the tube to the next in line" (ibid: 350). The owner of a 'shooting gallery' explained (p. 352):

> The government licenses my business. The soldiers deliver the drugs here or they pay truck drivers to bring it. Some of the heroin I provide has been pre-paid by the Chinese mine owners who arrange for us to give free daily fixes to employees who show me their identity card. The rest we buy from dealers approved by the army. If a miner needs more than his daily quota he can buy 15 grams for 2500 kyat [£8]. The heroin is always pure; this is Burma, after all. My only problem is needles. Needless are hard to come by, and so we have to make them last. Eight hundred customers per needle, I reckon.

A Kachin jade trader who had visited the mines told me miners use heroin to resist pain, hunger, and fatigue. A Burmese medic estimated that more than 60 per cent of the "constantly changing residents of Hpakant, more than 500,000 people, were using heroin and 90 per cent of them injected the drug" (ibid: 353). Levi and Scott-Clark also reported that Hpakant teemed with brothels, which escalated HIV infection in the mining areas, from where it spread throughout the region with miners and jade traders. While the government in the 1990s denied that Myanmar had AIDS, UNAIDS in 1998 reported that at least 440.000 people were infected in Myanmar, and an anonymous medical report from 1996 concluded that 99.5 per cent of injecting drug users at the mines in Hpakant were HIV positive (Levi and Scott-Clark: 353, 361). A 1999 survey set the HIV prevalence rate among injecting drug users at 92 per cent in Muse, opposite Ruili, and 77 per cent in Myitkina in Kachin State (UNODC: 52). The flooding of Kachin state with heroin might be suspected to be a government war tactic, which by sedating or killing Kachin youth hampers recruitment of soldiers and politicians.

The intertwined social lives of heroin and jade in the Myanmar-Yunnan borderlands can be compared to how Naylor (2010: 134) describes the relation between cocaine and emeralds in Colombia: "Coca planters might be former illegal emerald miners and vice versa; money from one business might be used to finance another; and both products took similar clandestine routes out of the country". Much heroin and methamphetamine is smuggled into China through the Dehong prefecture. A jade trader in Ruili told me some smugglers hide drugs in hollowed-out jade stones. After filling the stones with drugs, they are sealed with stone skin and wax and hidden amongst ordinary jade stones. In November 2010, Chinese police seized 1.2 kilograms of pure heroin and 2.1 kilograms of high-grade amphetamines in Kunming. They also found stones that had been hollowed and lined with carbon paper. The dealer cooperated with a man in Myanmar, who hollowed out the stones, filled each of them with 100 and 300 grams of drugs, and shipped them across the border to China labelled as 'unfinished jade'. The carbon paper was intended to block x-rays during customs inspections.[26]

**10.** A hollowed out stone that was filled with drugs and sent to China as 'jade'. © Gokunming.com

Opium has been cultivated for centuries in Yunnan for medicinal purposes and as a cash crop (UNODC 2001: 44). Following the opium wars in 1839-1842 and 1856-

[26] Dan Siekman in Gokunming.com, 17 November, 2010.

1860, China became the world's leading opium producer, the bulk of production concentrated in Yunnan and Sichuan (ibid). In 1876, a failed uprising led Yunnanese Muslim Panthay rebels to settle in the Kokang and Wa areas of Burma's Shan State, where opium became the dominant crop (ibid.). Around 1887, a British military expedition reached the Kachin jade mines, and the expedition's advisor on Chinese affairs, W. Warry reported: "The Kachin and Chinese carry opium to the mines to sell to the miners […] and carry back jade" (Lévy and Scott-Clark 2001: 146). Opium cultivation was banned China in 1912, leading Yunnanese opium farmers to settle in Burma. After their takeover in 1949, Chinese communists launched opium eradication in Yunnan, and KMT troops took over opium production in the Wa, Kokang, and Kengtung areas of the Shan State, where also Shan separatists traded opium to finance war efforts against the government military after Burma's independence in 1948 (UNODC: 46). In the late 1970s, the Communist Party of Burma controlled around 80 per cent of poppy fields in Burma, while the KMT controlled heroin refineries and trafficking in competition with warlords like Khun Sa, who dominated opium and heroin smuggling from 1976 to 1996. Khun Sa smuggled drugs from Burma to Hong Kong via Thailand, and the dismantling of his organisation diverted trafficking to Mainland China, which saw a 300 per cent increase in heroin seizures from 1995 to 1998 (ibid: 51). Today, opium production is concentrated in the Wa and Kokang areas of the Shan State, where also many methamphetaime labs are located (precursor chemicals are usually imported from China), and to some extent in the Kachin State. According to Dutch NGO Transnational Institute, poppy cultivation now mainly occurs in areas controlled by Tatmadaw-backed militias, and heroin refineries in Kachin State are primarily located in areas controlled by government-alligned Border Guard Forces.[27]

While large-scale opium cultivation has been eradicated in Yunnan, poppies are still grown sporadically and used in local cuisine in Ruili. Many locals in Ruili consider opium a 'Traditional Chinese Medicine' (*zhongyao*), and elderly men occasionally drink tea with opium to stimulate digestion and ease pains. I was served opium chicken soup in a Dai restaurant in Ruili and in the home of a Jingpo family outside Ruili. In the Dai restaurant, clients ordered the soup two days in advance. The restaurant owner then fed opium to the chicken, and did not let it eat or drink water until it was slaughtered. The chicken was boiled for hours. After dinner, the restaurant owner offered a slice of the chicken's opium-filled intestine to each man at

[27] *Asia Times* (2 April 2019).

the dinner. In the Jingpo village, opium poppies were put directly into the chicken soup, which was cooked with wild mountain herbs (*yecai*).

When borders to Myanmar were opened in the early 1990s, Ruili became notorious for drugs, gambling, and prostitution. From the early 2000s, authorities initiated a crackdown campaign, which has moved some illegal activities underground (Egreteau 2012: 103). On my second day in Ruili, two jade traders took me to the border town of Wanding, where an elderly woman sold them a hind leg of a mountain deer, which had shot by poachers across the border in Myanmar. While they insisted that all locals who can afford it eats poached meat, they told me not to take pictures. Here, it is useful to separate between the categories of 'illegal' and 'illicit'. Abraham and Van Schendel (2005: 20) employ a matrix with the categories 'legal' and 'illegal' emanating from the state order, and 'licit' and 'illicit' emanating from society, as visualised below (see also Abraham 2006).

| **Authority** | **Legal** | **Illegal** |
|---|---|---|
| Licit | Ideal state | Underworld/Borderland |
| Illicit | Crony capitalism / failed state | Anarchy |

**11.** Abraham and Van Schendel's matrix of competing authorities

The 'underworld/borderland' is described as "social zones of interaction that, though banned by formal political authority, are nonetheless sanctioned and supported by prevailing social mores" (Abraham 2006: 4). Some practices that are formally illegal in China are locally considered morally acceptable and thus licit. While illegal, the use of raw opium as 'Chinese medicine' (*zhongyao*) in Dehong renders it licit for many locals. The same seems to be the case for untaxed gemstones and hardwood, poached wildlife, and gambling, which are illegal, but considered licit by many. Meanwhile, refined heroin and amphetamines are widely considered 'drugs' (*duping*), and are both illegal and considered illicit by many, as is counterfeit jade in Ruili.

While raw opium is considered to have medicinal benefits in Dehong, refined heroin has devastating consequences. The spread of heroin and HIV in Yunnan intensified with the opening of the Myanmar-Yunnan borders. Despite Yunnan's population making up only 3 per cent of the national population, its reported cases of HIV in 1999 accounted for 34.8 per cent of total HIV cases in China, and China's first HIV outbreak was observed in 1989 with 146 infected injecting drug users in Ruili (Jie *et. al.* 2010). In Yunnan, the Dehong Prefecture is overrepresented in HIV

prevalence, and ethnic minorities are overrepresented within the prefecture. Although the Dai and Jingpo minorities respectively constitute 2.5 and 0.3 per cent of Yunnan's population, they accounted for 7 and 9 per cent of new HIV infections according to a 2005 study (cited in Fu *et. al.* 2011). Based on a study with 591 participants from a rural ethnically mixed community in Dehong, Fu *et. al.* (2011) found high prevalence rates of drug use (18.8 per cent) and HIV infection (5.5 per cent), as compared to the official HIV prevalence estimate among China's general population, which was less than 0.1 per cent in 2014. Fu *et. al.* relate the high HIV prevalence to the Dehong Prefecture's location along drug trafficking routes. Some hotels in the Dehong Prefecture had pamphlets informing about HIV and drug abuse. In Longchuan, a cartoon pamphlet in my hotel room depicted the transformation of a nicely dressed and groomed Asian man into a sweating junkie depicted as a Caucasian man.

A Dutch-Chinese couple, which runs an NGO supporting Jingpo teenagers in a mountain village between Mangshi and Ruili, told me around half of adult men in this area are using drugs. In the 1990s, also Ruili teemed with heroin. A Jingpo government official told me: "People were fixing in the streets back then. You could buy drugs everywhere. One bag only cost around 10 *Yuan*. Now there is only one street in Ruili, where you can buy drugs". He said mostly people above 40 years old use heroin, while many youth smoke methamphetamines ('ice', *bingdu*) and ephedrine (*mahuangsu*), characterising the two types of drugs as making people relaxed and exited, respectively. Guoguo said many Jingpo men, who were young in the 1990s when heroin flooded the Dehong prefecture, have passed away. Employing the binary of 'emptiness' (*xu*) and 'fullness' (*shi*) mentioned in Chapter 1, Guoguo said highland ethnic minorities in Dehong are deeply rooted in their own traditions and culture, and that spiritual life for them is more important than for city dwellers. But when anti-spiritualist communism was introduced here, the ethnic spiritual systems were broken down. Post-Mao capitalism and opening up to the outside world then introduced a material 'fullnesss' of new consumer goods, including drugs. In her analysis, heroin use was a way for young ethnic men to escape the material world and connect with *xu*, which can mean both emptiness and spirituality. For Guoguo, this disappearance into the emptiness of heroin use in a deadly way proves that spirituality is more important than materialism. "City people are still drunk in materialism", she said, "but ethnic people have lost more, because they are closer to the spiritual world". Guoguo thus posited both Mao-era socialism and post-Mao-era capitalism as anti-spiritualist pathologies from a highland ethnic perspective, in which the Chinese State

seems a looming spectre of unnatural tragedies in need of remedy (see also Mueggler 2001). One implication is an appropriation of male roles and tasks by some women in Jingpo villages almost devoid of men in the age group of 40-45 years old.

Meanwhile, local ethnic culture is exoticised, and sometimes eroticised for male Han Chinese consumption. Some hostesses in Ruili's KTVs perform the ethnic Dai Peacock Dance dressed in Dai costumes, but I was told not all performers are Dai. Also Zhou, who did alcohol business in Ruili, hired KTV hostesses to perform dances in ethnic costumes to promote Carlsberg beer, and in a cultural park outside Ruili visitors can for a fee take pictures of 'long neck' Burmese Ta'ang women wearing ethnic costumes and brass coils that appear to elongate their neck.[28] The hotel owner Mr Liu told me about the *monihei* 'mud festival' of the ethnic Wa in southwestern Yunnan: "In this festival, you smear mud on women you like. You can grab the women, no problem. The ethnic minorities in Yunnan are very openminded [*kaifang*]", Liu grinned. In Lugu Lake in northern Yunnan, the local ethnic Mosuo's matrialineal society and tradition of 'walking marriage' also attracts domestic tourists.[29] When I visited in 2005, Lugu Lake was a quiet village, but in 2012, 1.5 million tourists visited the region, and a red light district had emerged in the village, where allegedly Southeast Asian sex workers dress up in Mosuo costumes (The Guardian, 19 August 2013). Also Sandra Hyde's (2001) discussion of how non-local Han Chinese sex workers perform and play on the cultural characteristics of Tai-Lüe ethnicity in Xishuangbanna highlights how ethnic culture in Yunnan is sometimes 'eroticised' for Han Chinese male tourists.

In a book published by the Ruili government's propaganda department, the secretary of the Jiegao Border Trade Zone and the Mayor of Ruili City write:

> In Ruili, the 5 minority tribes have been living here generations after generations. All minority tribes live here in harmony since long ago. Each of them contributes greatly to the cultural diversity and richness here […] Ruili shares border with the Jade Kingdom of Myanmar and is the well-known Oriental Jade City. Jade is the primary commodity here […] After 30 years' reform and opening-up, there has already been a solid basis for Ruili's scientific and sustainable development (Yang and Dao 2009).

[28] The Ta'ang are also called Palaung in Myanmar and De'ang in China. The neck is not actually elongated, but visually appears to be, because the brass coils deforms and prevents growth of the collarbone.

[29] Property and children belong to the female kinship line and some couples do not cohabit, but men may visit their lover at night and return to sleep in their mother's house.

The book features glossy images of local ethnic groups, nature, cuisine, festivals, the border gate to Myanmar, agricultural products, and jade. Page 56 exhibits pictures of young women from the five major ethnic tribes in Ruili, dressed in ethnic festival costumes. The accompanying text reads: "As a multi-ethnic port city, with Dai, Jingpo, De'ang, Lisu and Achang nationalities living here in harmony, all nationalities there work hard for the scientific and great-leap-forward development of Ruili with a united and pioneering spirit". Such 'officialese' language, mirrored in CCP formulations about national culture, creates a picture perfect of local ethnic groups representing unity and harmony under a CCP-sponsored mode of development, which grinds off the rough edges of their life conditions and experiences, while packaging their culture for tourist consumption.[30] The official promotion of 'unity in diversity' (*he er butong*) has civilizational dominance of Han culture at its core (Sigley 2016a: 197), and the configuration of China as a 'multinational unified state' with a Han majority as the 'default ethnicity' and 55 affiliated 'minority nationalities' (*shaoshu minzu*) dates back to ethnological studies and classifications in the early 1950s (Fiskesjö 2006: 18-19; Harrel 2001). Feicui necklace pendants worn by the Dai, De'ang, Lisu, and Achang women in the pictures seem to address Han Chinese consumers more so than local ethnic cultural taste.

[30] The CCP Central Committee 'Resolution Concerning Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Developing a Flourishing Socialist Culture' on 18 October 2011 featured a similar formulation adressing unity of culture on the national level: "In China's five thousand years of civilizational development each of the nationalities have tightly unified and continuously, in an unbroken line, collectively created an ever flowing profound and deep Chinese culture, which in turn has provided enormous spiritual strength for the strong development of the Chinese people and provided great contributions for the civilizational advance of humanity that cannot be ignored" (cited in Sigley 2016a: 177).

**12.** Women from the five largest ethnic minority groups in Ruili dressed in ethnic costumes. © dmpress

## The 'Fake Amber Machine': Gem Trade in the Kachin State

I am drinking Burmese milk coffee in a teahouse overlooking the Ayeyarwady River, when a young man sporting black sunglasses parks a loudly crackling 250 cc Honda Dirt Bike, and addresses me: "Hey man, welcome to Myitkina!" Jack is a local ethnic Jingphaw.[31] He holds a bachelor degree in English and has worked for a foreign NGO, but lost this job recently. I soon come to appreciate Jack's English language skills, personality, and local knowledge, and we enter into a tacit reciprocal relationship: Jack acts as my guide in Myitkina, and I cover our daily expenses on gasoline and food.

For the next three weeks, I cruise Myitkina's dusty roads on the Honda Dirt Bike, Jack on the backseat giving directions. We check jades, rubies, and sapphires in

[31] Classifications of different Kachin sub-groups vary. According to Jack, there are six major sub-groups: Jingphaw, Zaiwa, Maru/Lawngwaw, Lisu, Lashi/Lachik, and Rawang.

teashops, scour the jade market, and talk to amber traders and miners in their homes. We visit churches, an orphanage and an IDP camp, shoot pool, attend a wedding, go for picnic, and make music videos for Jack's projected YouTube channel. On the motorbike, I get used to Jack's way of commenting our environment: "Take a right turn my man, there are beggars in the intersection" ('beggars' being Jack's word for Burmese traffic police, who take bribes for not fining you for some fictive offence). Or, "attention, there are two fine Kachin women straight ahead. But they will probably marry Chinese men, cause China has too few women". When we pass logging trucks or pyramid-shaped gravel mounds indicating illegal gold panning, Jack mutters "why do they cut down all our trees here, don't they have trees in China?" or "our land is so rich, but those Chinese bastards take everything". Jack's perception of the injustice of Chinese appropriation of Kachin natural resources combined with his eyeing of economic opportunities becomes manifest in his design of a toast for when we have a beer: "We drink to taking the filthy money from the rich Chinese bastards and giving it to the poor and the needy".

Hanging out with Jack teaches me how knowledge and trust configures opportunities in the Myanmar-China gem trade. Jack occassionaly brings in some cash as a *bwesa* (broker) in the gem trade. This position requires trust, but not necessarily deep gemstone knowledge. Jack explains:

> I have a high reputation recognized by everybody I know. They say, "Jack is my bwesa!" I don't know about jade and amber, but they can trust me. I have some friends, who have a major business, and do jade or amber as a side business. When they are busy with their major business, they ask if I can sell this [gemstone]. Sometimes I get percentage [of the sales price]. Sometimes, if my friend wants 1 lak [100.000 Kyat; 66 US$] and I can sell it for 1,5 lak, I can keep the 0,5 lak.[32] That's the brokerage technique. It depends on your clever and smooth talk. Making impression on buyers. The broker doesn't need much effort, what you invest is your talk. You use clever, smooth talk, so people can tune their minds into the interesting story you tell. Like, "this jade stone is cheap, you can turn it into a bracelet and make money". We have so many ranges of marketing.

Jack takes me to a teahouse, where bwesa wait for sellers and buyers. Soon, some men arrive with feicui stones, which they let the bwesa examine. Jack says some gemstones pass through 4-5 bwesa. If someone bids on a stone, the first bwesa calls the owner of

[32] The exchange rate was approximately 1 US$ to 1500 Myanmar Kyat during my stay in Myanmar.

the stone, who decides about the price. According to Jack, Chinese traders introduced counterfeit jade to the Kachin State 8-9 years ago. While the bwesa's key skill is to make buyers believe in, or 'see', potentials in particular jades, determining the authenticity and quality of jades ultimately depends on the buyer's gemstone knowledge, which in turn affects his reputation. Jack tells a story that illustrates this principle:

> There is a famous story told by jade traders. 8 or 9 years ago, a Chinese guy brought a very prestigious jade to Hpakant [the mining area]. It was a knockoff. He gave it to his local friend to sell for him. The local bwesa showed it to everybody. They thought it was found at a jade mine. Finally, a local rich guy bought it for millions of dollars. The buyer brought it to China to sell. When he found out it was a knockoff, he lost everything, went down overnight. He lost his prestige, and had to start his jade life again. The seller never appeared again. The bwesa told the buyer, "it's not my fault. You are the buyer, you should carefully study [the jade] before you buy". Later they brought fake jade from China to Hpakant. Some say it is just class B or C; they use low-quality jade to make knockoff jade [by treating it with chemicals and colour]. The knockoff jade started spreading 7-8 years ago, after that Chinese did this. The buyer tried to keep it a secret, because it is very shameful in the jade community. If you get cheated it means your knowledge it not good enough. Fame is very important. If you have fame, all jade buyers and sellers trust you. Trust is very important. For example, if I give you a stone to sell for me and you run away, how can I trust you? Nobody wants to deal with you again. So people do business with people they trust.

The story highlights a tension between stones that in a given moment 'are what they are' and people, who may signify the stones to be something else. Jack says mines are like brands that attest to certain qualities of jade, and that some traders lie about the mine origin of stones to raise their value. For Jack, bringing jade counterfeited in China to sell at the mines at Hpakant in 2006-2007 was a clever move, because while counterfeit jades were widespread in China they were unknown in Hpakant at that time. Consumer perceptions of the authenticity of many types of goods often presuppose that they are found, cultivated, or produced in particular geographical sites (Reddy 1986; Vann 2013; Zhang 2014; Miller and Davis 1983). Selling a counterfeited jade in the mining area made it more probable that buyers would consider it genuine than if it was sold in Chinese markets. It is up to the buyer to determine the authenticity of a piece of jade, and sellers and brokers can evade moral responsibility by arguing that they do not know if a jade is counterfeit. For the buyer,

then, gemstone knowledge trumps trust in people. Meanwhile, trust in relationships is essential for the seller, who gives his jade to brokers to sell and to carriers to transport.

Jack and I interview Kachin traders at a jade market north of Myitkina. The market is closed on Sunday, which is church day. "We are Christians", Jack says, "we believe you should not do business on Sundays. If you do, you could have bad luck, or one of your family members may fall ill". One trader at the market estimates that the government now (in 2015) controls 75 per cent of mines and the KIA 25 per cent. He says the KIA taxes miners 10-20 per cent of the value of stones they excavate. Traders, who buy jade from government-controlled mines and pay taxes can get a certificate, issued by the Ministry of Mining, which allows them to export the jade. To apply for the certificate you need to be a member of a jade trade association. There are limited seats, so you must apply quickly after the seats are announced. Traders without export permission for their jade usually use 'carriers' to smuggle it. He says most carriers here are Kachin and Bamar. Their salaries vary with the amount and quality of the jade smuggled. After giving jade to the carrier, the owner goes to China and waits for the carrier there. This arrangement reduces risk of imprisonment for the owner, but requires trust in the carrier. The carriers have cultivated relationships with the KIA, Burmese military and police, and Chinese immigration officers, and bribe their way through. First, the carrier goes to the checkpoint without the jade and negotiates the bribe with the officers and pays it in advance. Then later, he brings the jade by car or motorbike, and the officer will not 'find' it. But if a carrier without the right connections is caught smuggling by Burmese government military or police, he risks being imprisoned; usually for 3-4 months, but sometimes for 1-2 years.

We interview another trader, whose mother leases three government-controlled mines in Maw Siza. She also used to have a mine in Maw Wun Kalay, but left it when fighting between the Tatmadaw and KIA erupted there. She has done jade business for 20 years, and has a jade trade association license, to be renewed annually, which allows her to export the jade. She brings most stones to Ruili to be carved into jewellery. She sells what jewellery she can in Ruili, where prices are higher, and brings back the rest to Myitkina. Her son says carvers in Hpakant and Myitkina are mainly Bamar, as few Kachin people have these skills. The feicui sold in Myitkina is of low quality, he says. The best stones are sold in China or at the emporiums and markets in Naypyidaw, Mandalay, and Yangon. The leftover stones not sold there may then be traded in Myitkina.

Another Kachin trader tells us locals have recently found feicui around Putao Township in the far north of the Kachin State. There is no industrial machinery there, but locals may find good stones even with basic tools. He says these stones are 'outside politics', which means neither the Tatmadaw nor the KIA controls or taxes mining there yet. After fighting re-erupted, some locals started 'digging in the shadow': "When the political situation is fixed, jade business is difficult", he says, "but when there is fighting poor people can go digging, because there is no control". He finds it best to stay clear of 'politics', and he lived in Yangoon and Chiang Mai for several years, because the KIA tried to reruit him. Some of his friends mine jade. A 'boss' pays for their lodging and food, and they split the profits on stones they find 50/50 with the boss. He says there are more than 10 checkpoints on the road to the Chinese border at Gambaiji. The Chinese border officials are harder to bribe than Burmese officials, so his friends smuggle the stones across the border on motorbikes. The government also controls the road from Myitkina to Laiza, where the KIA controls an area around the Chinese border. It is difficult to cross the border here, because there is fighting and security is tighter. Some stones are smuggled via Bhamo to Muse and then into Ruili. The trader describes his first visit to Ruili: "I was schocked! There is so much jade and wood there. All is from our Kachin State. It was sad to see". Digging up a stone, smuggling it, selling it, carving it, or wearing a piece of jewelry comprise restricted fields of vision – relations to trees rather than to a forest, so to speak. Nobody has a full overview of the opague feicui industry, but for this trader, witnessing the extent of Chinese import of Kachin natural resources in Ruili provided a shocking widening of vision.

While traders still offer jade for sale in Myitkina, the jade trade has almost come to a halt at my visit there in March 2015. The market recession is also detectable in data compiled by Openjadedata.org, which shows that average prices of unprocessed jade fell from 127.69 US$ per kilogram in 2014 to 10.52 US$ in 2015, and the total value of official exports to China fell from US$ 12.280 million in 2014 to US$ 1.927 million in 2015.[33] Traders in Myitkina say the recession is caused by China's economic slowdown and Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign, which started to be felt here in spring 2013. This shifted Chinese demand towards amber, a cheaper material with similar perceived medicinal properties, but not as associated with corruption (see also Rippa and Yang 2017). This shift has engendered frantic amber mining, especially by ethnic Lisu, in the Hugawng Valley outside Tanai northwest of Myitkina. Some of Jack's friends participate, and he shows me videos they sent him.

[33] See http://openjadedata.org/Stories/how_much_jade_worth.html

The miners dig holes into the forest floor, and excavate the amber. Jack says the KIA controls most amber mines, but some miners just go to the forest and dig. "Now, everybody wants to do amber business, also jade businessmen", he says. Most traders we interview here also sell amber. While Ruili's traders told me feicui prices boomed from 2009 to 2013, traders in Myitkina say amber prices exploded from 2013, pointing to a contingency between market fluctuations in different gemstone sectors. Jack feels amber has better features than jade: "It is good for your health, boosts up your system. You can make drinks from amber powder, there are many recipes".

We interview amber miners and traders in Myitkina. One is an ethnic Lisu herbalist, who says burning amber and inhaling the smoke can cure different ailments. He leases an amber 'hole' (mining pit) outside Tanai. His friends work the hole, and he sells the amber in Myitkina and in Tachileik on the Shan State border with Thailand. Another Lisu we interview leases five amber holes in Tanai. He says also many Chinese rent mining holes and bring equipment, but hire Lisu workers to do the actual mining. Most holes are 8-10 meters deep, but some go as deep as 50 meters. 3 meters down there is not enough oxygen in the hole, and they provide oxygen via a generator-powered airtube. Chinese businessmen have to pay both the KIA and the Tatmadaw, and hire local carriers to transport the amber to China. This mine owner hires a carrier to bring the amber to Myitkina to avoid some of the taxes applied along the road. The KIA and the Tatmadaw control different sides of the entrance to the amber mines, and both levy taxes. There are 3-4 Tatmadaw checkpoints on the way to Myitkina that can be avoided or where the carrier can bribe the soldiers. But there is a Tatmadaw checkpoint marking the entry//exit to Myitkina, which cannot be avoided. The carrier's fee depends on the weight and quality of the amber and the risks involved. The mine owner explains:

> I negotiate with the carrier, considering the risks. The carrier pays for the checkpoints. If nobody finds the amber, he doesn't need to pay. Then his carrying costs are cheap. If the amber is precious I pay him more. We fix the price before leaving. You have to trust the carrier. The more precious stones, the more trust you need. There are two kinds of carrying costs: For expensive amber, the price is 1/10 of the amber's value. If it is cheap, maybe only 6 to 12 US Dollar per piece.

Similar to jade transport, taxes can also be reduced by hiding expensive amber pieces among cheap ones. This mine owner keeps most of his stock at the mines. If he meets a buyer in Myitkina, he will have the amber transported here. Like feicui, most large amber pieces feature a skin that makes it impossible to know what hides inside. These

are also called 'betting stones'. While most of the world's amber ranges in age from 3 to 40 million years old, amber in the Kachin State is around 100 million years old, and many pieces contain unique plant, insect, and animal inclusions. In 2015, a 99-million-year-old feathered dinosaur tail was found in an amber piece in the Hugawng Valley (KDNG 2019: 9). The mines produce numerous amber types, including the popular deep-red *'blood amber'* and transparent bright yellow *'gold amber'*, alongside *'diesel'*, which has a bluish-black skin, but is red inside, and *'pig-fat'* with a greasy, yellow-orange colour. This mine owner's best piece is a 300-grams 'gold amber' with no visible cracks. He figures it can sell for 3.000-4.000 US$ in China. That is a lot of money here, but much lower than what a top-grade feicui stone the same size sells for. He sells his best amber in Tengchong in Yunnan, which attracts big Chinese buyers.

He sells both betting stones and jewellery made by a local carver. The price of the jewellery is usually 25 per cent higher in Yunnan than in Myitkina. Like feicui, amber bracelets fetch the highest prices, but carving is risky, because the amber can break if is has cracks inside. Prices for betting stones fluctuate precipitously, based on what buyers and sellers believe hides inside the stone. Recently, there has been fighting in the mining area, and the mine owner says both the KIA and the Tatmadaw are recruiting soldiers now. Considered a sub-group of Kachin here, some Lisu join the KIA. He says there used to be six mining areas outside Tanai, but because of the fighting only one is open now. Another Lisu man shows us quartz stones. He makes charcoal by burning wood and covering it with soil, and he found quartz when digging in a forest outside Myitkina. He does not know which use quartz has, but figures it might be in demand in China. Another Lisu man found opals and asks me if I can sell them for him in China.

Some local perceptions of Chinese appropriation of resources in Kachin State - from gemstones and hardwood to farming land, hydropower, and 'import' of wifes - highlight how interactions in borderland 'contact zones' often occur in "contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power", as Pratt (1991: 34) argued. Outside Myitkina, villagers have been relocated for the Myitsone hydropower dam, a Myanmar-China joint venture that would export electricity to China. Due to protests, the project was suspended in 2011, but Jack says there are still Chinese construction workers there, and he fears Chinese pressure will see the project resumed. As we pass the cordoned-off road to the construction site, Jack says the Chinese company also digs for minerals, uranium, and gold there: "They started digging as soon as they arrived, cause they know this place will be flooded later", he says. Guoguo visited some of the relocated villagers. They told her the military and the Chinese company

held a ceremony, where they were ordered to watch and clap as their houses and fields were bulldozed. Shifting attention from its role in destroying the villagers' homes to that of a benevolent donor, the Chinese company gave the kids drawing books and told them to draw their new homes, which were to be printed in a calendar with a picture of the projected dam.

We visit an elderly Lisu man in Myitkina, who lives in a big house on a plot that also hosts a guesthouse with 7 tenants. Jack says the plot may now be worth up to US$ 500.000, as Chinese investments drive land and house prices up beyond what many locals can afford. Rental prices also increase due to labour migration: "People may earn 800-1000 *Kyat* [US$ 0.5-0.6] per day on hard labour in lower Myanmar, but here they can earn 4.000-5.000 *Kyat* [US$ 2.6-3.3] per day as construction workers". The Lisu man says his family used to cultivate corn, but that Chinese businessmen buy up land to cultivate cash crops like banana, rubber, and agar trees, the oil of which is used in Chinese medicine. As prices increase, many farmers sell their land, and the scarcity of farming soil makes food more expensive. But he also profits from Chinese demand. His son rents amber holes in Tanai, and he sells the amber in Tengchong, Yingjiang, and Ruili, where he has family. Jack estimates that up to 80 per cent of Myitkina's population is not 'formally employed', but engage in various import-export businesses with China.

The report *Blood Amber*, published by the Kachin Development Network Group (KDNG) in 2019, indicates that the Kachin State's amber industry is undergoing a trajectory similar to that of the feicui industry. As Chinese demand soars, armed clashed intensify, and the Myanmar military appropriates mining areas and leases out mining concessions to private actors. The Tatmadaw launched a major offensive in 2018, according to the KDNG to take control of the amber-rich Hukawng Valley, where the Ledo Road that connects India with China and is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, is also located. Their aim, the KDNG report argues, is to control this strategic location and the natural resources around it. The Tatmadaw fought the KIA in Tanai from June 2017 until October 2018. The KDNG reports that many outsiders came to the area after the offensive, when the government announced that non-locals could apply for private extraction licenses. Many locals, who sought refuge in IDP camps, are not allowed to enter the amber mines, and fear they will become landless as amber mining increases in the area.

Our examination of a declining feicui market and a booming amber market in Myitkina is coming to an end, and we are sitting in a teahouse, when Jack presents the following plan to me:

> Man, now amber is the hottest commodity in the market. Demand is still higher than supply, so now is a good time! But everybody knows about this business, the market is established. People have mining holes, and the Chinese already control the market in China, so it is a difficult market to enter. So how do we do it? We sell knock-off amber to the Chinese!
>
> The Chinese at the mines don't know much about amber, so they can easily be cheated. So you must import a machine to Myitkina that can make fake amber. Then we feed some materials into the machine and fake amber will come out at the other end. People know about fake jade here for 7 or 8 years now. The Chinese introduce fake jade here, so people are careful about jade. But until now, nobody heard about fake amber, so it's very important to keep that word silent. Don't say 'fake' and 'amber' in the same sentence, because then people will become suspicious. See the guy over there [Jack nods towards a Sikh man a few tables away from us], he likes to suck up other people's ideas, so never talk about fake amber in front of him. Maybe in China there is fake amber, but not here. So you must find a knock-off specialist in Denmark, so I can study from him.

Changing control of the mines and upscaling from artisanal to industrical mining favours Burmese and Chinese companies with high investment capital, while many locals are directed to work as labourers, small-scale traders and middlemen, or 'digging in the shadows'. Jack perceives of some Chinese appropriation of Kachin resources as injust, or illicit. His plan to sell counterfeit amber to Chinese buyers might be seen as a 'weapon of the weak' that operates in the margins of a market structured by states, big businesses, and Chinese consumer demand. Jack certainly combines market knowledge with ingenuity - another proposal of his is to train a monkey to find amber in the forest. But the intimate relations between state agents and private businessmen blur distinctions between state and non-state actors and between licit//illicit and legal//illegal economic practices (see Abraham and van Schendel 2005). We have seen how not only gemstone traders and smugglers, but also state agents like government military, police, border guards, tax agents, and official jade appraisers engage in practices defined as illegal by the state. The Myanmar-Yunnan gemstone market is not always a matter of friction between a legal and licit market operated by state agents, and an illegal and illicit market conducted by 'ordinary' people (see also Rippa 2019). Sectors of the market are performed through interactions between state, and non-state actors that render categories like legal, illegal, licit, and illicit less fixed and more situationally defined. Both knowledge

and lack of knowledge is exploitable in this market. Chinese traders profited from a lack of knowledge about counterfeit feicui in the Kachin State 8-9 years ago, and Jack now proposes to similarly exploit a presumed lack of knowledge about counterfeit amber among Chinese buyers in the Kachin State.

## Manual Labour and Big Business in Mandalay

I visit Mandalay's main jade market in February 2015. Here, the trade is primarily in betting stones from 6 am to 9 am, in necklace pendants and bracelets from 9 am to 11 am, and in cabochons and beads from 2 pm. Most feicui here is of low quality. Traders also sell rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and amber.

Outside the market traders sell jade 'by-products'; materials left over after the best jade in a stone has been carved. By-product jade jewellery often fetches 10 to 70 US$ here. Also outside the market are rows of polishing stations worked by foot pedal. Polishers step on pedals connected to a rubber tube that rotates metal-silica disks for grinding and a wet, soft bamboo tube for polishing. Polishers attach feicui onto a thin bamboo stick and work it against the rotating tools, intermittently spraying water on the stone. It takes around 15 minutes to polish a 4x5 milimetres cabochon and costs 300 *Kyat* (0.2 US$). One polisher says he works for 10 hours daily and can earn around 5.000 *Kyat* (3.3 US$) per day.

Inside the market feicui cabochons and beads are displayed on rectangular pieces of gold and silver to let buyers assess their shine in rings. A trader says she buys 20-30 feicui cabochons at a time to get a bulk discount. She buys from brokers she knows well. Sometimes brokers also sell cabochons for her, receiving 5 per cent of the profits. While some women operate stalls here, most brokers are men. She shows me a feicui cabochon that sells for around 13 US$ here, and says it could sell for four times as much in Ruili. She pays 20 US$ in monthly rent for her small stall, sells around 20 cabochons a month, and earns around 200 US$ monthly. Once a month, her uncle goes to Ruili to sell cabochons. She wears a feicui bracelet, and thinks it is beneficial for her health, because the weather in Myanmar is hot, but the jade is cold on her skin.

Another trader says there are few good betting stones at this market. Some Chinese-Burmese mine owners have good stones, but sell them at the emporiums or smuggle them to China, often collaborating with Mainland Chinese investors. Officially, only Burmese passport-holders can rent mines, and Chinese-Burmese can

also function as straw men for Mainland investors. Her family buys cut stones and by-product feicui here in Mandalay. They have a carving workshop here, but send their best feicui via Ruili to Guangzhou to be carved, and the jewellery is then sent back to Mandalay. This is because carving is better and cheaper in Guangzhou, she says. There is also counterfeit feicui at this market. "If a piece of jade is very beautiful and cheap, you should be suspicious. Counterfeit jade is often very green, it looks too perfect", she says. Most counterfeits here are byproduct jades infused with colour, but she can usually detect the colour with UV light. She says some traders here justify adding colour by saying "don't you put makeup on your face? We just put makeup on jade to make it more beautiful". She provides certificates of authentificy, issued by a local gemmologist, for expensive feicui pieces.

A Chinese-Burmese friend in Ruili connects me with his friend in Mandalay. 24 year-old Joe picks me up in a Honda sedan to go dine and drink with his friends. They are all descendants of Yunnanese, who settled in the Kokang area of Myanmar's Shan State generations ago, and say many Kokang Chinese in Mandalay intermarry and do business together. We drink in a bar owned by one of the men. The clients are Chinese, and the bar owner says he makes around 20.000 US$ on the bar monthly. Joe points to a young woman in the group, and says her family is very rich: "They do opium business, they have their own army in Kokang". Joe says that while women must be 20 years old to marry in China, many Kokang women marry when they turn 18. One of the women sells skincare products via WeChat and the other has a clothing store. Most of the men have studied abroad in Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Guangzhou. Joe studied business in Guangzhou. But he says they do not study hard; they just want to get their diploma and go back to Myanmar to do cross-border trade. Joe's family does jade business, but he wants to try out his own business before joining the family trade. He buys truckloads of watermelons in Myanmar and sells them to Chinese buyers in Ruili.

Joe's friend, Gary, has a flat in Ruili, where his uncle does jade business and owns two hotels. Recently, his uncle also started buying clothing in Guangzhou and selling it in Ruili. "We just follow the market", Gary says. "Suddenly feicui became very valuable, and my family started investing. Now the feicui market is not good. This is a problem for those, who invested in a lot of stones. They still have to sell all those stones without a loss". Gary is trying to raise funds for constructing a spa, conference, and hotel building in Yangon, and e-mails me his 26-pages project proposal. The budget is 6 million US$, and he tries to raise the capital through his family's network in China. Gary studied business in Shanghai. Business does not really interest him,

and he dreams about being an actor, but he needs to make his family proud. He is gay and has HIV, but did not tell his parents. "They are traditional Chinese", he says, "it is difficult to show them who I really am". Joe likewise feels a strong responsibility towards his family. He feels his older brother has 'broken away' from the family by living alone with his wife and children. Joe's girlfriend is a Chinese-speaking ethnic Dai, and he hopes to have enough money to marry her next year, and then wants them to cohabit with his parents.

While their Chinese background and language allows this group to broker Burmese resources to Mainland Chinese buyers and investors, they refer to themselves as 'Kokang' (*guogan*), rather than as 'Chinese' (*zhongguo ren*). Joe and Gary say they do not have good relations or much in common with Mainland Chinese, and they both found locals arrogant and obsessed with 'face' when they studied in China. Conversely, they have good relations with both Bamar here in Mandalay and with Kachin, Shan, Ta'ang, and Wa in the borderlands, and they have friends, who joined the KIA and the MNDAA. They point to political problems in Myanmar – for example, some politicians offered Gary's family money for their votes in last election - but they feel proud that Myanmar is more democratic than China.

A female Chinese-Burmese jade trader I interview in Chiang Mai similarly voices stronger national belonging to Myanmar than to China. She is a 3rd generation descendant of Fujianese migrants to Myanmar, and lives in Yangon. Her family leases mines in Hpakant, and sells the feicui in Yangon, Mandalay, Chiang Mai, and Ruili. As it turns out we have several common jade trader acqaintances in Ruili. Her family's company has a carving factory with 20 workers in Mandalay. Her uncle oversees the mines and she is in charge of sales. Their mines mainly produce high-grade lavender-colour feicui, and they sometimes buy other feicui types from mine owners and at the emporiums. Most of their customers are Mainland Chinese. But she says they do not sell their best feicui to Mainland Chinese. "We want to keep good stones in our country", she says, "and the best feicui we keep in the family". Her mother gifted her top-quality feicui jewellery. She will give it to her own daughter, when she marries. I ask her if she sees herself as Chinese or Burmese. "I am *huaren* [overseas Chinese]", she answers, "so I'm in-between, but Myanmar is my country". This 'interstitial subjectivity' (Chang 2008) allows her to sell feicui to Mainland Chinese buyers, while defining China as 'outside' by keeping the best materials 'inside' her country and family.

Joe takes me to visit his parents, and tells me the elaborately carved mahogany furniture decorating their living room costs more than 300.000 US$. He says there

are two kinds of Chinese businessmen in Myanmar. The first group is Yunnanese settled here for many generations, who either do drug business in Kokang, Wa, and Shan areas, or do feicui. The Yunnanese feicui traders are some of the richest people in Mandalay and Kachin State, he says. The second group is more recently arrived Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong provinces, who are mainly settled in Yangon. He shows me a picture on WeChat of a friend of his posing with two Rolls Royces, a Lamborghini and a Bentley. "He is a *huaren* from Yangon", Joe says. "They are doing drug trade. They send heroin to China. A small bag that costs 30 *Yuan* in Mandalay can be sold for 300 *Yuan* in Guangzhou".

Business in Myanmar is stratified by accesss to investment capital and customers, which – due to Western economic sanctions and China's economic boom – increasingly come from Mainland China. Hill (1989) discussed how Yunnanese near-monopolised processing, wholesaling, and transporting of Xishuangbanna tea in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Here, "the proximity of a well-developed central place system in the adjacent region of Yunnan-Guizhou affected the structure of the commodity markets in the Xishuangbanna and facilitated the dominance of those markets from the central places, which they were supplying" (ibid: 337). Thus, "participation in markets is to some extent conditioned by the structure of the market system itself" (ibid.). Likewise, the 'central place' markets in especially the Yunnan and Guangdong provinces to a large extent structure the feicui industry. In this context, ethnic Chinese groups settled in Myanmar, who command both Chinese and Burmese languages, networks, and cultural codes are uniquely positioned to broker Burmese resources to Mainland Chinese buyers and investors. Mirroring a pattern of Chinese processing and export of natural resources extracted abroad, some high-grade feicui is mined in Myanmar and then sent to eastern China to be carved before being sent back as jewellery to be sold in Myanmar. Access to technologies, industrial infrastructure, and artisanal skills thus also structures stratification between ethnic and national groups. While we saw that a bar owner can earn 200 times the salary of a jade polisher in Mandalay, large-scale feicui, and drug trade can generate profits on a much grander scale.

## Knowledge and Ignorance: Jade Users in Shanghai

Chinese demand for feicui feeds on narratives that animate the material as more than 'dead matter' and support consumers' images of themselves and their social worlds.

Such narratives include some information and exclude other. Knowledge about feicui matters for consumers' self-images, but so does ignorance.

I interview Cindy and Chloe, both in their early 30s, in a café in Shanghai's French concession. A native Shanghainese, Cindy holds an MA degree in English, works for a British market research company, and has an American boyfriend. Chloe is from northern China, has an MA degree in sociology from a British university, works in marketing, and is married to an Indian man. Both wear jade jewellery. Cindy says she did not wear jade in her 20s, because it represents an older generation, and because she did not know about jade back then. She started wearing jade after she learned more about it, and expresses a need for knowledge about products she wears to avoid being seen as a fraud:

> If you don't have knowledge about what you are wearing, it becomes like fake stuff. I don't wear jade Buddha jewellery, because I don't know enough about Buddhism yet. So if someone sees my jade Buddha and asks me about Buddhism, I would not know how to answer. It is like Louis Vuitton customers. They feel they have to know about the brand before wearing it.

Elsewhere, I have discussed how acquiring knowledge about foreign luxury brands like Louis Vuitton is one way for Chinese consumers to build confidence that others will consider products they use, and thereby their self-signification as consumers, genuine in a market saturated with counterfeits (Møller 2010: 79-80). Many Chinese women receive, and learn about jade from their mothers. Jade knowledge is also communicated by vendors, advertising, and popular and scientific dissemination, including journals like *China Jadeite*, which hosts information about mineralogy, culture, history, and business of feicui. Such information often couples jade, including feicui, with Chinese civilisation, as iterated in the current nation-state. Akin to how Sigley (2015) describes a bourgeoning Chinese 'tea nationalism', the positing of jade as a unifying symbol of Chinese nationhood in the past decades may be seen as feeding a Chinese 'jade nationalism'.

Chloe feels jade expresses her Chinese identity *vis-à-vis* foreigners. Her father's friend knows people in charge of a nephrite jade mine in her home province, and gifted jade bracelets to her and her mother. She previously felt it pretentious to wear daily, and only wore it with Chinese clothing like *qipao* dresses. Now she wears the nephrite bracelet and feicui earrings daily:

> I feel it is part of my identity. Not in China, because many people wear jade here, but when I am abroad [jade jewellery] becomes part of my Chinese identity. I wear jade abroad to differentiate, to counter homogenisation. The world is becoming similar, so I differentiate myself through what I wear. Jade is quite formal. It has a very grand aura [qichang] to it. When older people wear jade it does not feel too formal. Because they are older, they already have the aura to wear it. The jade should match your aura, but your aura can also rise with the jade. Sometimes your aura and a jade do not match. It's the same as between people; sometimes their auras do not match.

For Cindy, wearing jade is more about family relationships. She wears a jade bracelet that belonged to her great-grandmother. She also wears the bracelet when she sleeps, and feels she cannot take it off, because her deceased great-grandmother would feel it. "I wear it because it is a family heirloom", she says. "I feel I have an obligation to wear it. I have to nourish it. When you wear jade, you nourish it. Then when you get older the jade nourishes and protects you". I discuss perceived protective capacities of jade and mutual cultivation (*yang*) between people and jade in Chapter 8, and just note here that jade heirlooms can host biographies of, and obligations towards both living and dead family members.

For both women wearing jade also marks a turn to adulthood that coincides with their reconnection with traditional Chinese culture. Cindy started wearing her jade bracelet three years ago. Chloe compares jade with the old poems they had to recite, and the calligraphy they had to write in school. "This is traditional Chinese culture. You cannot appreciate it when you are a child. But after you grow up you start to appreciate it. I got a lot of jade at my wedding. After that I started wearing jade". She says there has been a revival of jade in recent years:

> The revival of jade happened at the same time as the revival of Buddhism. People are tired of things changing too fast. It's putting a strain on us. We are rooted in Confucianism; we want things to progress in a natural way. China's power is rising. For 100 years, we put Western culture over our own culture. Now Chinese people are picking up our old culture. Many people start to play traditional Chinese music instruments, do calligraphy, going to teahouses. There is a 'national fever' [*guoxue re*] now. It started maybe around 2010. People in their early 20s are still exploring new things. I started to appreciate traditional Chinese culture in my late 20s.
>
> The highest form of traditional Chinese culture is calligraphy, because it is formless. When you play guzheng [a Chinese zither] you need the instrument. But in

> calligraphy, the instrument is your qi [life energy]. Qi is formless. In Taoism, the formless is superior to the form. Caoshu [a cursive calligraphy form] is the most superior art form. It's very messy, hard to read the characters. But people can see your personality in your writing. And the doctor can tell the state of your body through your writing. This is your qi coming out.

I write 'form//formless' in my notebook, but Chloe says this is a Western way of thinking. "You cannot put it into binary oppositions", she says. "I also told my British sociology professor that you cannot put Chinese concepts into western forms. For example, you cannot say that jade is *yin* or *yang*. You need both. Jade can nourish you, and you can nourish jade. *Yin* and *yang* must be in balance". Chloe points to a current 'national fever' as a reaction to rapid changes in China. In the 1980s to 2000s, young urban Chinese were discovering Western products and lifestyles. But as China's economic rise leads it to a more assertive global position, 'traditional' national culture is also reinvented as a remedy for stress, competition, and uncertainties in a capitalist economy. Chloe points to Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism as sources of meaning and stability in this context. Zhang (p. 99) similar describes how Yunnanese Puer tea was reinvented in the early 2000s as manifesting the 'spirits' of Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism because of its longevity, and "was used as a metaphor for a way of life in which one should pursue a slow-paced and peaceful lifestyle to counteract the high speed of modernity". Meanwhile, Chinese people increasingly express nationalism through consumerism. This manifests in new popularity of jade, tea, and calligraphy, but also in countless nationalist boycott campaigns against foreign companies and countries that have 'hurt the feelings of the Chinese people', for example by listing Taiwan as a country, or supporting Hong Kong's pro-democracy protestors.[34]

Cindy's mother gives her pressure because she is still unmarried, and Cindy finds her job stressful. She is interested in Buddhism, and paints Tibetan Buddhist mandalas in her spare time. She wants a simpler, less stressful life, and considers going to Dali in Yunnan to work in a café. She likes Dali, because she met interesting people there with alternative lifestyles. Dali has for decades been a stage for quests for

[34] In one case, Chinese netizens accused company Zara of 'uglifying China' by not photoshopping away the freckles from a Chinese model's photos. In numerous anti-Japanese campaigns, Chinese citizens have been reported to destroy not only Japanese businesses, but also their own Toyota cars in displays of patriotic frenzy. *Nikkei Asian Review* (8 September, 2019) suggests that igniting anti-foreign patriotism is a way for state propaganda machines to "consolidate its audience" and for online publications to win praise and followers, "which can be transformed into advertisements and money".

'traditional' and 'authentic' (ethnic) culture among Western backpackers and, more recently, Chinese 'lifestyle migrants' and tourists (Notar 2006a; Sigley 2016b).[35] In the context of societal changes and pressures, some Chinese urbanites construct things like jade, practices like calligraphy, and places like Yunnan as tokens of a desired traditionality and authenticity.

I later interview Cindy's 58 year-old mother, Mrs Yang, who shows me her jade jewellery. Mrs Yang has worn a jade bracelet, gifted to her by her husband, for more than 20 years, and never took it off. Buying jade, she decides upon the carving style, colour, and price range, and then her husband, who understands (*dong*) jade, will find a good piece within this frame. She does not buy very expensive pieces, because she wants new jewellery occasionally. "It's like clothing, you have to change sometimes. Collectors buy expensive jade, but just keep it in the drawer. I wear my jade". Mrs Yang says that rubies only look good with black clothing, but that you can wear jade with different clothes. She feels jade is more 'traditional' (*chuantong de*) than other gemstones, and mentions the popular saying, "jade cultivates people, and people cultivate jade". She elaborates on the human-jade relation:

> It shows on the jade, when I am not feeling well. Two years ago I was sick, and my jade [bracelet] became more opague. My friend was always sick, so her jade bracelet was not transparent, eventhough it was a very expensive piece. Other gemstones are dead, but jade is alive. We have a connection with it. It's a lucky stone, and protects you against accidents. One of my friends stumbled and her jade broke, but she was not hurt. If you are beautiful, jade can make you more beautiful. But it doesn't fit everybody. My friend has many jades, but her hands are not pretty, so she doesn't wear jade bracelets. But you can always collect jade, because every jade is unique.

Mrs Yang thinks jade fits elderly women well: Similar to some clothing, jade looks better on you if you have certain maturity or 'style' (*daqi*). You have to match jade with your clothing. Her wardrobe is mostly black, grey, and brown, and she likes to wear a green jade necklace with a long dress. She wears this necklace 'outside' on the dress to match the colours, rather than 'inside' on her skin. She feels appreciation of jade expresses accomplishment and self-cultivation (*xiuyang*). She says more people

[35] When I visited in 2018, Dali was packed with guesthouses, restaurants, bars, souvenir shops, selfiestick-strapped Chinese tourists, and CCTV cameras, lending a 'Disneyland-like' character to the city. Some 'firstmover' Chinese from eastern China, who had settled in Dali a decade ago due to its laidback atmosphere, told me they considered relocating elsewhere in Yunnan, as Dali had become too commercial and touristic for them. They said a massive influx of tourists had likewise spoiled the attraction of Lijiang in northern Yunnan.

buy jade now, because they have more disposable income, and many buy it as investments, because prices keep rising. Jade also expresses social class. Her father was an official in Shanghai's Jing An district government, so her family was well-off, but most of their jade was taken during the Cultural Revolution. "There was no use hiding it, they just came and took it from us. In that time there were some second-hand stores. If you had a good working class background, you could buy some pieces there, but if you were from a suspicious class background, you would not dare trying to buy there. During the Cultural Revolution very few people wore jade".

Cindy and Chloe's narratives about how jade symbolises and enforces family and kinship relations, national culture, and identity echo those of other Chinese respondents, and I decide to challenge their narratives a bit, to get them off script. I ask if they know where feicui comes from? They both say China. I then tell them about some detrimental aspects of the feicui industry in Myanmar's Kachin State, as outlined in this chapter. They are surprised feicui is not mined in China, but Cindy says "It doesn't matter where jade comes from. What matters is who gives it to you. If you received jade worn by royalty it would be important". Cindy thus emphasises previous users rather than extraction site as important for the biography of a jade piece.[36] While locals in Ruili know feicui is mined in Myanmar, if not the Kachin State, many respondents in Shanghai thought feicui is a domestic Chinese material.

Why and how does some information become prevalent in narratives about jade in China, while other does not? Robert Proctor (2008) coined the term 'agnotology' as the study of ignorance making, and proposes attention to "the conscious, unconscious, and structual production of ignorance, its diverse causes and conformations, whether brought about by neglect, forgetfulness, myopia, extinction, secrecy, or suppression" (ibid: 3). Proctor presents three views upon ignorance. First, ignorance as 'native state' implies a kind of 'original deficit' not yet penetrated by knowledge, which spurs education and science to remedy it (ibid: 5). Secondly, views upon ignorance as 'selective choice' recognise that focusing on some issues implies ignoring others, and "once things are made unknown – by suppression or by apathy – they can often remain unknown without further effort" (ibid: 8). Thirdly, ignorance

[36] A biographical association with famous previous users may raise the value of jades. I attended an auction of the Danish Prince Consort Henrik's jades, which he started collecting from a young age, while living in Vietnam. The origin and age of the jades was not indicated, but most were nephrite jades of mediocre quality and seemed to be between 80 and 200 years old. The association with the Prince Consort was deliberately indicated in each jade by the Danish auction house Bruun Rasmussen: "We mark the provenance on each object with a label displaying a large H [for Henrik] under a royal crown. In this way, *we ensure that future generations will also know who these objects have belonged to*" (Bruun Rasmussen 2019: 2; emphasis added).

as 'stategic ploy' is actively and often deliberately produced, and Proctor discusses the tobacco industry's efforts to manufacture doubt about the hazards of smoking as a prime example of 'agnogenesis' (ibid: 11-18). More so than strategically misinforming, I found Chinese feicui vendors to contribute to ignorance by selectively highlighting history, culture, and symbolism of jade in China, while omitting practices, context, and consequences of feicui extraction in Myanmar's Kachin State in their narratives.

The diamond company DeBeers successfully made diamonds 'a girl's best friend' and a symbol of marriage in the West (Proctor 2001). Similarly, jade has been successfully constructed in China's reform era as a symbol of an identity that extends amost seamlessly from the individual via the family to the Chinese nation-state. Purifying such symbolic connotations of gemstones involves filtering out unpleasant aspects of their biographies, and the Kimberley process' work to eradicate African 'blood diamonds' made DeBeers prosper by presenting a supposedly 'clean' alternative (Naylor 2010). It is not so strange that many end consumers do not know where feicui is mined. Alienation, gaps, and distance between production and consumption are defining features of global capitalism. Woods (2011b) employs a global commodity chain approach in examining Myanmar's timber trade, which is carried out mostly by Chinese. Tracing connections between timber production in the Kachin State, processing along the China-Myanmar border, and consumption in Shanghai, Guangdong, and Hong Kong, Woods reveals the violence of the insurgent economy in Myanmar, the role of Chinese merchants in this trade, and how the violence in Myanmar "becomes erased as the commodity becomes globalized as a product to be consumed" (ibid: 502). From the opposite end of the commodity chain, Walsh (2004) examines 'speculation' by sapphire miners and traders in Madagascar, first, in terms of their market speculation *in* sapphires, and secondly, in terms of their speculation *about* the uses to which foreigners put the sapphires. Similar to Woods' case of timber, Walsh discusses 'knowledge differentials' between Malagasy sapphire miners and foreign traders (ibid: 234). In these cases, as in the feicui trade, aspects of what Kopytoff (1986) called the 'biography' of a commodity are (deliberately or not) hidden from the view of some actors. Combined with the subsumption of feicui as a sub-type of jade (*yu*), the erasure, downplaying, or tainting of 'Burmese' parts of feicui biographies allows Chinese consumers to ascribe positive meanings of nephrite jade as a national Chinese symbol to feicui as well.

Should we expect Chinese consumer demands for 'cleaner' feicui in the near future? I find this unlikely. The discursive space is narrow in China. The official

contemporary narrative is of China's 'peaceful rise', which is projected domestically as a return to a glorious past before humiliation by foreign powers and internationally as mutual economic benefits and 'aid' for trade partners and resource rich developing countries. The narrative implies that China incurs nothing but positive effects abroad and, pushed by the CCP, the narrative is per definition right. Much information is obviously silenced or tainted within this discursive space. I ask a feicui company manager in Ruili if Chinese traders and buyers have any responsibility for the conflict in the Kachin State. She is surprised: "The war is in Myanmar. We are Chinese, why would we have responsibility? We think the war will make prices rise, so we must buy feicui now". Meanwhile, a feicui trader in Shanghai responded: "We help these countries. We buy their things, so they should be happy. It is not China's fault that the Myanmar government does not help its citizens […] But honestly, in most of Chinese people's hearts, they think China is their world, they never look at other countries". Such comments indicate a moral sphere that does not extend beyond China. Demands for fairness, sustainability, and good practices in the global economy – akin, for example, to the anti-corporate activism of the 1990s discussed by Naomi Klein (2001, 2002), or current climate activism – are more likely to derive from a cosmopolitan conception of participation, agency, and morality in a world that exceeds one's own nation-state than from an authoritarian ethnonationalist discursive space. As media are politically controlled and censored in China, voices critical of Chinese involvement in the feicui trade and other businesses – for example, China's selling of weapons to both the Myanmar government and ethnic insurgent groups – are not likely to gain domestic momentum as long as these businesses are of strategic and economic importance to the CCP.

## The Productivity of Opacity

The Myanmar-China feicui trade likely employs more than a million people in numerous places, some of which are difficult to access for outsiders. While it is impossible to gain a full overview of this opaque industry, this chapter has instead presented some voices from different nodes in the commodity chain.

Feicui has possibly been mined in the Kachin hills and known in Yunnan for well over a thousand years, but did not become widespread in China until it was exported to Peking as Imperial tribute in the late 18th Century, which likely upscaled mining. The plunder and imports of feicui from China to the West by colonial powers has

profited Western private collectors, jewellery companies like Boucheron and Cartier, and auction houses like Sotheby's, Christie's, and Bonhams. Feicui has in many periods been a protagonist in wars, from Qianlong's war against Burma's King Bodawpaya to its use by the KIA as payment for weapons from the KMT and recent armed clashes for control of the mines. The Myanmar government's appropriation of mines and Western economic sanctions targeting Myanmar's gemstone sector demonstrate the role of feicui in economies and politics of nation-states. But as we have seen, feicui also plays a central role in histories and economies of groups that operate beyond, and contest nation-state claims of sovereignty over the land they live in. I have pointed to continuities and changes in the feicui industry. On the one hand, current trade routes, tax percentages, valuation practices, and resources like gemstone knowledge and trust in social relationships acquired shape and importance a long time ago. On the other hand, changing militarised control and upscaling of mining in past decades has gone hand in hand with increasing Mainland Chinese involvement, and seems mostly to benefit Burmese political-military elites and Han Chinese investors, while other groups experience several detrimental effects of the industry.

The purification of meanings of feicui as a symbol of national Chinese identity thrives on distance and gaps between production and consumption, and involves filtering out 'Burmese' aspects of feicui biographies. While for example Kachin brokers in Myitkina and Kokang traders in Mandalay profit from connecting feicui suppliers and buyers, disconnections between people, places, knowledge, and values can likewise be profitable (see also Safonova, Sántha, and Sulyandziga 2018). Similar to the opacity of skin-covered feicui betting stones, the opacity of mining and the networks and trajectories through which feicui is traded invites both economic and spiritual investments. As I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter, such investments are based not only on what people know, but also on what they do not know and what they think other people do not know.

# 4. Visibility: Jade Trade and Carving in Ruili

Whereas the previous chapter discussed how 'opacity' and lack of knowledge could engender investments and imaginations in different nodes of feicui commodity chains, this chapter focuses on the making and staging of 'visibilities'. Realising the value of something often involves making it visible. This process spans scales in the feicui industry.

First, with the opening of Sino-Myanmar border trade in 1988, establishment of the Jiegao Border Trade Zone in 1991, national policies to develop China's Western regions in the 2000s, a Master Plan for Ruili in 2012-2013, infrastructural projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Ruili has been promoted as a hub for jade trade and carving, and a gateway for China's trade with Southeast Asia (Chen 2015: 39). This includes making Ruili visible in Yunnan, China, and beyond. For example, Ruili is designated as a 'Special Gem and Jewelry Production Base in China' by the Ministry of Land and Resources and the Gem and Jewelry Trade Association of China (Yang and Dao 2009). Secondly, border trade fairs are held annually and new market towns are constructed in Ruili to gather jade companies in clusters. Thirdly, some companies carefully design 'exhibition environments' for their jade. Fourthly, jade carving is about exposing the most benign properties of stones when carving them into form. Finally, realising and converting meanings and values of materials like jade is often predicated on their visibility in social arenas.

This chapter first situates Ruili as a centre for feicui trade and carving in Yunnan and Dehong. It then outlines occupational stratification in Ruili's jade trade, and discusses practices, resources, skills, and orientations in the trade in the context of market fluctuations. The chapter then discusses how 'exhibition environments' in feicui companies support symbolic connotations, and value hierarchies of feicui. The next section discusses jade carving as industrial production, craft, and art. Finally, similar to how Julie Chu (2010) discusses 'divine efficacy' in Chinese ritual economy,

I discuss visibility of wealth and value in terms of a recursive principle that draws in more and more participants and investments in the feicui trade, creating 'bubble-like' markets.

## Ruili in Context

Due to its large and historical population of ethnic Dai and Jingpo, Dehong ranks administratively below Yunnan province (*Sheng*) as an 'Autonomous Prefecture' (*Zijizhou*), and the prefectural governor and vice-governor and leading positions on the sub-prefectural level are reserved for Dai or Jingpo representatives. The administrative units in Dehong are 1) Prefecture (*Zhou*); 2) County (*Xian*) and City (*Shi*); 3) Township (*Xiang* and *Zhen*); and 4) Village (*Cun*). Ruili and Mangshi are Cities and rank administratively on a par with the three Counties Longchuan, Yingjiang, and Lianghe. Ruili City hosts five Townships, divided into two Jingpo *Xiang* (Mengxiu and Huyu), one Dai *Xiang* (Jiexiang), and two *Zhen* (Nongdao and Wanding). Both Nongdao and Wanding townships sit on the border with Myanmar's Shan State and host some jade trade.[37] A township can comprise several villages, each with their own political leader.[38]

I visited all five major cities in the Dehong prefecture. 1) Mangshi is the seat of the prefectural government and home of the political elite. It hosts some jade trade. The inhabitants are mainly locals, around one third of which are ethnic Dai. 2) Lianghe is a quiet town without much jade trade and also hosts a large Dai population. 3) Located upland, Longchuan is the Jingpo 'capital', and hosts the liveliest annual Jingpo Munao Festival, but little trade aside from in agricultural products. 4) Yingjiang previously hosted the prefectural government. It borders Myanmar's Kachin State, and is considered Dehong's capital for 'betting stones', while the carving industry is less developed. 5) Ruili is the prefecture's jade and business capital. It hosts an ethnically diverse population of locals, Chinese and Burmese immigrants,

[37] Nongdao Township is situated after Ruili in the extreme southwestern corner of Dehong, and hosts an open air market. Wanding, a designated 'Economic Development Zone', is located between Mangshi and Ruili, and jade shop workers said most customers are tour groups *en route* to or from Ruili. With a new elevated highway between Mangshi and Ruili completed and an upcoming railway line from Dali to Ruili, Wanding's customer base may decline.

[38] One village can also be divided into two different townships based on ethnicity. For example, around half of the population of the village Bangyang is ethnic Dai and belongs to Jiexiang Township, while the other half is Jingpo and belongs to the Huyu Township.

itinerant workers, jade traders and buyers, and has a well-developed carving sector compared to other cities in Dehong and Yunnan.

North of Dehong, I visited Tengchong, Hehua, and Heshun. *Tengchong* (population 620.000) is a county-level city of the Baoshan city prefecture, and was an important node in the Ancient Tea Horse Road. Tengchong had around 20.000 people working in the jade industry in 2015, but is outmatched by Ruili and Guangdong in terms of carving industry and by Yingjiang in terms of supply of feicui stones, and the majority of feicui here is low-grade jewellery carved in Guangdong (X. Sun 2015: 31). But Tengchong has become a centre for a trade in amber from the Kachin State, which boomed after demand for mid-, and high-grade feicui dropped after 2013. The city has an airport, allowing easy access for tourists and gem buyers. Most customers are from northern cities like Beijing and Tianjin, where amber is more popular than in southern China. Chinese buyers associate amber with Tibetan Buddhism, which some say holds amber as one of seven 'treasures' (*baowu*). Local traders say feicui is too expensive for many buyers, but that 'common people' (*laobaixing*) can afford amber. Some traders avoid risks and taxes at the mines, road checkpoints, and the border by having Kachin, Lisu, and Chinese-Burmese deliver the amber. Transport had become more difficult by 2014, as border guards started checking for amber. But a Burmese trader, who brought amber from Myitkina to Tengchong via the border crossing at Gambaiji, said you could bribe the border guards to bring in the amber.

Most traders I interviewed in Tengchong sold 'gold', and 'blood' amber, and 'mixed types' like 'gold amber with beeswax' (*jingzhong piao mila)*, 'gold and blue amber' (*jinglan po*), 'brown-red amber with beeswax' (*zonghong piao mila*), as well as 'distinguished amber' (*te se*), which includes pieces with plants, insects, or water bubbles (*qipao*) inside. One trader also sold 'pure' beeswax amber (*mila*) from Russia and Ukraine, which he buys in Shenzhen. But I also met traders in Ruili, who bought beeswax amber in Kaliningrad and Ukraine, and had it transported to China via Vladivostok. The most popular type was 'blood amber' in 50-gram pieces, from which you can carve two or three necklace pendants. A 50-gram blood amber piece was around 40 *Yuan* per gram in 2014, and could fetch around 6000 *Yuan* when being carved into jewellery; 3 times the investment. Prices rise with weight, and big pieces of blood amber could be more than 200 *Yuan* per gram. Unlike feicui, amber is thus sometimes valued in per-gram prices that develop with demand. Like feicui, carved amber used to 'play with in the hand' (*shou wan*) is popular, and some such pieces sold for 10-20.000 *Yuan*, while good-quality bracelets sold for 40-50.000

*Yuan*. Like feicui, some buy big amber carvings, for example of Buddha, to 'show off' on their office desks. I also interviewed a trader from Fushun in Liaoning Province, which hosts amber mines. Some Fushun amber is pulverised, boiled, and used in traditional Chinese medicine, for example to avoid miscarriage and to calm the nerves. The trader said amber jewellery could also ward off ghosts and evil spirits (*bixie*). Carving forms and beneficial effects of amber and feicui are often similar.

*Hehua* is a village 10 kilometres from Tengchong with around 5.000 inhabitants, where some carvers from the eastern Henan and Fujian provinces have settled. This region has a tradition of rotating markets, and there is a feicui market here every five days and one in Tengchong every five days. A local trader tells me almost all households here 'do feicui'. Many carvers buy feicui stones (*shitou*) in Ruili and carve them here, albeit they send high-grade materials to Guangzhou to be carved. This trader usually buys jewellery from her friends here or in Tengchong; people, she knows and trusts. She is afraid to buy feicui jewellery in Ruili, because there are many counterfeits there. She says mainly Burmese traders sell counterfeits in Ruili. She also sells nephrite jade from the Xinjiang Province, emeralds from Myanmar, and rubies from Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. Most of her clients are tour groups on day trips from Tengchong, who mainly buy jewellery. She adds 20 to 30 per cent to her price, which she later gives the tour guide as a commission for bringing the tourists to her shop. She explains:

> Now Xi Jingping has forbidden it. But they cannot check it here. All Chinese people know the tour guide gets a profit. They think it is a guarantee that the product is genuine. In China, there is always a way to go around the policy. We have no written agreement, so it is difficult to prove. Tour guides provide good service, pick them up at the airport and drive them to shops. And they pay less here than in Shanghai. My friend pays 1 million Yuan in rent per year for a jade shop on Huaihai Road in Shanghai. So she takes much higher prices for feicui than here.

Traders consider tourists the best customers, because they do not know feicui and local price levels. Many tourists from urban eastern China have money and spend it generously during their vacation. Also, some customers do not bargain hard when traveling in groups, because they do not want to be seen as poor or stingy. Meanwhile, local buyers know feicui and its price levels, and many have friends or family in the trade. This trader started trading online via WeChat in 2013. She sends pictures of feicui pieces and their prices to her friend in Shanghai, who posts them on her WeChat wall, and takes a middleman cut. The money is transferred via WeChat,

which is connected to your bank account.[39] She previously travelled to Shanghai with feicui, but can save the travel expenses now.

*Heshun* is a pittoresque village outside Tengchong. The village hosts a feicui museum, carving workshops, and feicui and amber shops. The museum guide says feicui was carried along mule-caravan routes and traded here since 600 years ago, and that locals from Tengchong were the first Chinese people to rent mines in the Kachin State. The museum features gem-carving tools from the Ming, and Qing Dynasties, which were operated by foot pedal (fig. 9). Heshun's markets mostly cater to tourists and sell low-grade products. Some traders sell small skin-covered pebbles for a fixed price of 280 *Yuan*, which contradicts arguments that each feicui piece is unique and prices can therefore not be standardised. Marketing the pebbles as 'betting stones' (*dushi*), the traders evoke imaginations that you might be lucky and find good feicui inside. But my local friend assessed from their skin that this type of pebbles does not contain valuable feicui inside. I talk to a trader, who sells amber from a 20-m2 shop that she rents for 100.000 *Yuan* annually. She buys the amber in Tengchong, and sells high volumes with low profit margins. She says profits are higher in the feicui trade, where you can easily earn 30-40.000 *Yuan* on a single sale. The tour guides take 30 per cent of the sales price of feicui and 10 per cent on amber for bringing customers to her shop. Sometimes, tourists shop without the tour guide, but when tour guides hear where they bought their gems, they will still come by and demand a cut the next day.

I interview a group of carvers from Zhengzhou in Henan province, who have settled in Heshun. They studied at a carving school for three years. They say each province has developed unique carving styles, so that you can tell on good carvings whether the carver is from Henan, Fujian, or Guangdong Province. They buy feicui stones in Jiegao and carve them here. They use low-grade materials, because demand is low now, and most of their jewellery fetches from 3.000 to 5.000 *Yuan*. The highest-spending customers are 40-50 year-old men, who buy the jewellery as gifts for their wives or girlfriends. They also carve agate (*manao*) mined outside Mangshi and tourmaline (*bixi*) mined in Nujiang north of here. Both materials are much cheaper than feicui and became popular since 2012.

*Ruili* and *Muse* sit in a valley on respectively the northern and southern side of the Ruili River (a tributary of the Ayeyarwady River). The Chinese Border Trade Zone in Jiegao is located south of the river, and you pass a Chinese checkpoint before the

[39] At this time, China was fast becoming an almost cashless society, and almost all payments – from grocery shopping to flight booking and electricity bills – are now paid via the WeChat app.

bridge. Jiegao hosts three official bordergates to Muse. But there are ways to cross the border unchecked (*toudu*) for people without the right documents or carrying contraband. In 2013-2018, three holes had been cut in the border fence through which people cross the border. Locals say you pay a bribe or a fine if police catches you, but that they rarely check. In the outskirts of Jiegao, where the river is narrow, a boatman ferries people across the border for 5 *Yuan*. Dai/Shan villages and fields previously dominated the valley. Some villages have now been swallowed up by Ruili's urban expansion, and Dai landowners have sold or rented off land for development, which, compared to what farming earns them, provides a substantial lump sum that can be used for investing in jade or other businesses. Ruili's development eventually leads uphill, and also Jingpo villagers are selling their land to companies doing logging or cash crop cultivation. A Jingpo family I met had sold their farmland for one million *Yuan* and built a new house, but had thus also lost their future income and sustenance.

Ruili's jade trade has up-scaled in conjunction with incorporation of the city into development projects as a stepping-stone for China's economic expansion into Myanmar and a trade node in the wider region. In 2018, jade traders pointed to Ruili's regional connectivity as a reason for buying real estate. Locals said new condominiums in Ruili sold for around 2.500 *Yuan* per square meter in 2017 and 3.500 *Yuan* 2018. Real estate prices in Jinghong, prefectural capital of Yunnan's Xishuangbanna Prefecture, were similar in 2015. But prices had jumped to 18.000 *Yuan* per square meter in 2018 due to construction of a railway, which as part of the Pan-Asia Railway Network will connect Kunming via Jinghong to Vientiane, Bangkok, and Singapore. Jinghong and Ruili are comparable on several parameters, including coming regional railway connectivity, and in 2018 many were convinced that a real-estate boom was just around the corner in Ruili. Still, a vast swath of housing built in eastern Ruili in 2014 lay derelict in 2018.

According to local government figures, the official population of Ruili was 187.000 as of 2012. The main ethnic groups are Han Chinese (57 percent), Dai (30 percent) and Jingpo (7 percent), the remaining population constituted by De'ang, Lisu, Achang and others. The city's unregistered Burmese itinerant traders and workers are not included in this figure. According to one Rohingya trader, there are around 35.000 Burmese, including Rohingya, in Ruili. Ruili also hosts Shan, Kachin, and ethnic Chinese from Myanmar, as well as some Uighur and Hui Muslims. A few Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, and Thai gem traders have also settled in the city. Many Burmese traders and workers from Muse cross the border through the holes in

the border fence to work or trade in Ruili and return to Muse in the evening or the weekends. According to a local government official, at least 50.000 people in Ruili – more than one fourth of the official population – were directly involved in the feicui trade in 2012, although many have not registered a company, but operate as freelancers. Also in 2012, the city hosted around 8.000 jade shops and six major jade markets. In 2013-2015 Ruili was known for high-grade jewellery and Jiegao for betting stones, while Jiegao had become a center for online *Zhibo* trade in low-grade feicui jewellery in 2018

Rather than Yunnan, Dehong, or Ruili comprising *one* gemstone market, different cities and areas are promoted, and position themselves as specialising in particular gemstones (for example amber or feicui), different versions of feicui ('betting stones' or jewellery, high-, mid-, or low-grade quality), and as catering to different customers (tourists, professional traders, or online buyers).

**13.** Many traders and workers cross the Muse-Jiegao border through holes cut in the border fence. Photo by the author.

## Organisation and Stratification in Ruili's Jade Markets

Han Chinese control most big companies and the carving sector in Ruili due to their wider access to investment capital and to buyers in coastal China, while other groups work as suppliers, transporters, brokers, street traders, and polishers.

Around 60 percent of Ruili's Han Chinese population are locals (*bendi ren*), while the rest are non-locals (*waidi ren*), who have come to Ruili mainly from eastern provinces with traditions for stone, and wood-carvings, and jade trade, such as Henan, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu and Guangdong. Ruili also hosts many businessmen from the Hunan province, who are often described as pragmatic business-minded people. More people from eastern provinces are carvers, while people from provinces in central China are mostly traders. While local Yunnanese people have built up supply-, and transportation networks, knowledge about feicui, and artisanal feicui carving skills over longer time, businessmen from central, and eastern China made money earlier on in the reform-era and often came to Ruili with investment capital to buy high-grade stones.

Also ethnic divisions to some extent manifest as occupational divisions. Many suppliers are Kachin, Bamar, and Chinese-Burmese, while many Rohingya work as polishers, street vendors, and brokers. Some Bamar and Rohingya operate stalls, rent ranging from around 500 to 2000 *Yuan* per meter monthly. Others are brokers, selling feicui stones owned by other traders. They usually receive 10 to 15 percent of the sales price. Other middlemen catch customers in the street, and bring them to shops, receiving 20 to 30 percent of the profit on deals they facilitate. In China, such brokers are referred to as 'yellow bulls' (*huangniu*) (see Møller 2010). Their role is similar to that of the tour guides. The unwritten rule that anybody who brings you customers is entitled to a share of the profit seems a defining feature of China's bazaars and clustered market towns. This institutionalised informal economy of middlemen was, as noted, targeted by Xi Jingping's anti-corruption campaign from 2012. It manifests an embeddedness of economies in networks and relationships, *guanxi*, which, as I discuss in Chapter 5, is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and does not seem to disappear with tighter formal laws and policies.

Geertz (1963) separated between 'firm-type economies', characterised by fixed prices, impersonal transactions, and competition between sellers, and 'bazaar-type economies', characterised by a 'sliding price system', where prices are determined through bargaining. The only shops with fixed prices in Ruili were outlets of big jewellery brands like Hong Kong-based Chow Tai Fook, whereas bargaining applied

in all other shops I visited. This interactive price establishment is characteristic for Chinese bazaaars, but also derives from the singularity of feicui; each piece is unique, so there is no standard calculation for prices. This invites both buyer and seller to engage actively in qualification and valuation of products. The shop owner and buyer bargain until they settle a price and the 'yellow bull' later returns for his cut. Shop owners may earn high profits from nonlocal buyers, who do not know feicui well.

Some sell feicui in the street. Two traders said it takes around 10.000 *Yuan* to set up a small business as a mobile vendor, while you need around 60.000 *Yuan* to buy a few good stones. But the big money is in the trade of high-quality stones, which demands much higher capital. In the Chinese trade community, investment capital is usually distributed as credit between people, often with feicui as security. A trader said that as a general rule, you could borrow 50 to 70 per cent of the estimated value of feicui deposited with a creditor at a monthly interest rate of 3 to 5 per cent. Friends also pool their money to buy expensive feicui pieces. A bank officer told me banks do not provide loans for feicui, because the trade is too risky.

Traders are organised in different Gem Trade Associations, based on ethnicity, regional affiliation, and status. There is thus a Rohingya-, a Kachin-, and a Zhejiang Gem Trade Association, while the Ruili Gem Trade Association hosts elite traders and carvers. Traders communicate their needs and concerns via the Gem Trade Associations to agencies under the Ruili City Government – the Industrial and Commercial Bureau, the Quality Supervision Department, the Propaganda Department, and the Police – that in turn exercise policies and regulations in cooperation with the associations. As visualised below, Ruili's jade traders can be stratified into nine major occupational groups:

| Occupation | Activity and Capital |
|---|---|
| 1. Middlemen ('yellow bulls') | Bring customers to shops for a middleman cut of the sales price |
| 2. Middlemen (tour guides) | Bring tour groups to shops for a middleman cut of the sales price |
| 3. Mobile vendors (1) | Sell jewellery owned by others in the street. |
| 4. Mobile vendors (2) | Buy small lots of jewellery, which they sell in the street or to shop owners |
| 5. Shop owners | Sell jewellery from their own shop. |
| 6. Mobile brokers | Sell uncut feicui stones owned by others |
| 7. Traders | Own small lots of uncut feicui stones. Sell from their shop or through brokers |
| 8. Big traders | Own large lots of high-quality uncut feicui stones. Often also operate shops in Ruili. |
| 9. Mine owners | Lease mines in Kachin State |

**14.** Occupational hierarchy in Ruili's jade trade (1)

Some of these groups overlap, and a street vendor could potentially earn more than a shop owner. But it is generally the case that: 1) Traders who invest in their own stones earn more than traders brokering other people's stones. 2) Selling higher quality feicui generates higher profits. 3) Investments in uncut 'betting stones' can generate both higher profits and losses than jewellery.

Aside from investment capital, networks, skills, and efforts, the positions and earnings of people in this hierarchy are also structured by when they entered the feicui trade, which for many non-locals was when they arrived in Ruili. The earlier you got involved in the trade, the more wealth you are likely to have accumulated. For example, the richest Rohingya traders have in most cases been in Ruili for a longer time than less wealthy ones. One Rohingya jade trader came to Ruili 20 years ago, and has established a very profitable feicui business, and has been appointed to the prestigious position of Chairman of Ruili's Gem Trade Society (*Ruili Zhubao Shehui*). Among the Rohingya, newcomers often start out as polishers or mobile vendors of jewellery owned by others, and then potentially advance in the hierarchy as they amass capital to buy their own stones.

Different groups engage in different temporal-economic orders. Mobile vendors must be alert and invest time in finding customers, but are not bound to one place. They scour the streets of the Zhubaojie bazaar, offering jewellery out of handbags. Cabochons are usually set in brass fingerrings to allow buyers to try them on, but will often later be set in gold, white gold, or platinum. The ideal customer is a tourist from urban eastern China, who buys jewellery as presents or for personal use, and does not know feicui well. Jewellery traders have higher sales volumes than traders selling more expensive betting stones, who may spend months without a sale. However, when a sale is landed, it could bring in a profit exceeding several months worth of work for the jewellery vendors and even years of work for polishers. The work of brokers of stones is structured by long periods of waiting. They also have to stay alert and approach potential buyers, but customers with capital to invest in big stones stones are fewer than jewellery buyers. This principle intensifies with the size, quality, and price of the stone. Owners of stones worth many millions of *Yuan* may wait for years before their investments is realized in a sale, but then a single sale could earn them millions of *Yuan.*

Visualising relations between quality of feicui and its level of processing, work volume, sales volume, and profit, the model below shows how ownership of high-quality uncut feicui decreases amount of work and increases potential profits, whereas

work volume is higher and profits lower for those who only have access to lower-quality processed feicui.

| Occupation | Processing | Work volume | Sales volume | Profits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Polishers | Polished jewellery | High | High | Low |
| Mobile vendors (1) | Polished jewellery | Medium | High | Low |
| Mobile vendors (2) | Uncarved stones, low quality | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Brokers | Uncarved stones, medium quality | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Investors | Uncarved stones, high quality | Low | Low | High |
| Mine owners | Uncarved stones, high quality | Low | Low | Very high |

**15.** Occupational hierarchy in Ruili's jade trade (2)

Still, the workload for traders with access to, or ownership of high-quality stones cannot be measured only in terms of sales volume, as it often involves establishing and maintaining *guanxi* relationships with potential clients (see Chapter 5).

In Chapter 2, I outlined how Ruili's feicui trade from 2013 to 2018 moved from the Zhubaojie bazaar in northern Ruili, via market towns in central Ruili to Jiegao south of Ruili. This happened in conjunction with declining demand for high-, and mid-grade feicui and a dwindling customer base of tourists, alongside the rise of online auctioning via the *Zhibo* app for low-grade feicui jewellery. Markets in China change fast as escalating investments and new technologies make certain commodities 'hot'. But as I discuss below, some traders see the *Zhibo* trade as unsustainable, because the impersonal online transactions invite cheating and counterfeiting, and therefore distrust. But rather than arguing for tighter regulation, they suggest that what matters in the trade is feicui itself and a deep personal knowledge that is necessitated by the complexity and singularity of the material.

## The Bazaar

Rohingya traders dominate one part of the *Zhubaojie* bazaar, while Chinese traders dominate another. The Chinese part of the bazaar has a few hundred shops, many of them with 4 to 8 workers. Its main street has 88 shops, 30 of which are owned by Fujianese traders. Prices for buying and renting shops vary with location, but a trader

said centrally located shops cost 1-2 million *Yuan* to buy and 30-40.000 to rent annually. Many shops have three floors. The ground floor is used as shop and sometimes also carving workshop, and the 1st and 2nd floors are used as residence.

Most feicui shops are run as family businesses, which often cooperate with other families and traders. If a client wants a particular product, a shopowner may sell a friend's product for a middleman cut. Also, traders often give feicui products to shop owners, who take a profit from selling them. Feicui thus circulate in the bazaar. The shops pay taxes, but unlicensed traders do not. Traders also pool money to buy expensive stones, and then share the profits from sales. The Gem Trade Organisations function as arenas for cultivation of networks and trust, and members sometimes invest in stones together at the emporiums in Myanmar. Traders, who need money to invest in a stone, can also acquire loans up to a few hundred thousand *Yuan* from the Gem Trade Association by posting their house or land as collateral. A trader said if you have some spare money in Ruili, you would usually buy feicui in antipation that prices will keep going up.

In 2015, the market was slow, but many traders expected it to bounce back. One trader said jade will always have 'potential' (*qianli*), and that you should not open stones with big potential; it is better to leave them unopened and let them gain value with time. Also, as carving can raise or lower prices of feicui, he said it is best to leave high-quality material uncarved until you meet a very skilled carver, who can expose the material as favourably as possible. In 2008, feicui worth some thousands of *Yuan* could be an investment, but the trader said that after the market recession from 2014 you could only be sure of mid-, and high-quality material worth at least 50.000 *Yuan* to gain value over time. Still, buying feicui in Ruili and selling it in eastern China remained profitable. In 2015, a Hunanese trader said pieces costing 1.000 *Yuan* in Ruili could sell for up to 5.000 in Guangzhou. He bought cut feicui stones in Ruili, brought them back to Hunan, and then sent them to Shanghai, where his sister sold them. Such trade is common, and point to how feicui is often traded via networks that span across China, from West to East.

Rohingya shops, stalls, and street traders dominate a main street and a few side streets in the Zhubaojie bazaar. Most mobile vendors sell cabochons, while shops sell jewellery and stones. Many Rohingya are kin. One trader says most Rohingya are from coastal Sittwe, as well as from Maungdaung, and Buthidaung townships in northern Arakan State. He says all Rohingya here do jade business. Like Chinese traders, Rohingya also pool money to invest in stones. For example, one trader says he and three friends invested 100.000 *Yuan* together in a stone. Such investment

demands trust and close relationships. Another trader pays 700 *Yuan* per month for a 1-metre stall, and earns around 30.000 *Yuan* monthly from the trade. He pays the rent to a private company that owns this part of the Zhubaojie bazaar. Traders apply for a trade license from the city government, which costs 500 *Yuan* and is valid for a year. Traders must apply with a copy of their passport, but many Rohingya do not have Burmese passports, and police may confiscate your jade if you fail to show them your trade license. Rohingya traders socialise around the mosque, which is usually full for Friday prayers. A trader says the Imam advises them to stay away from drugs and alcohol, be careful when going to Myanmar, have good trade ethics, be friendly with the Chinese, and not bring up the conflict in Myanmar here (see Chapter 6). But he says some Rohingya people have good relations with Buddhist Burmese and buy stones from them, because traveling to Myanmar is risky for Rohingya people.

Some Rohingya make a living grinding windows into feicui stones and polishing jewellery with resin. They are paid on per piece and the more hours they work, they more stones they can polish. It is a monotonous job, which demands concentration, but lacks the creativity and added value of carving. Some polishers work in workshops, some from home. I visit a Rohingya polisher, who works on the floor of a bamboo shed, where he lives with another polisher. The shed has two small beds, some kitchen utensils, polishing drills, and a pile of stones that he and his roommate have been commissioned to polish. The polisher recently kicked an eight-year heroin addiction, and has no money to buy his own stones. He earns 800-1000 *Yuan* per month from polishing, just enough to sustain a life in Ruili. In Chapter 3, we saw how some polishers in Myanmar use foot pedals to rotate the polishing tools. In China, polishers use electricity-powered disks and drills for grinding and resin polishing. Some companies polish low-grade feicui jewellery in a barrelshaped machine with pellets and powder of black silicon carbide powder (made from quartz sand, petrol coke, and silica). The electicity-powered barrel vibrates for 5 days and can polish 200 pieces of feicui at a time. Water is added to keep the temperature down and because feicui can crack if it becomes too dry.

Some Rohingya operate stalls in Jiegao. In 2013, rental fees were more expensive in Jiegao than in the Zhubaojie bazaar. A trader says he pays 3000 *Yuan* per month for a 1-m2 stall. He works with three partners, and they share expenses and profits equally. They buy bracelets in Mandalay, pay a carrier to bring them to Jiegao, and sell them at the stall. They pay the carrier upon his delivering the products. The traders says it is not difficult to bring in small amounts of feicui, but that the road between Lashio and Ruili is difficult for Muslims to travel, because there are many government

checkpoints. Low-grade feicui bracelets often come in batches of 5 bracelets drilled out of the same stone. This trader also buys bracelets from Buddhists. He says, "It doesn't matter who you buy from. You buy the jade, not the people". He says there are no fixed prices for jade; you bargain for as much as you can get. Your profits depend on your investment, experience, knowledge about jade, and knowledge about the market, such as which products are currently in demand. He says you need a good teacher: "Some people do not want to share their secrets. To learn about prices you must study the trade. It is a way of thinking. You need good eyes, good mood, and interest. You must put your interest in the stone".

While the Zhubaojie bazaar was busy in 2013, it was almost empty in 2018, and shopowners sat on expensive property with few customers to bring in income.

**16.** Trade of low-grade feicui in the Zhubaojie bazaar.

## Big Companies and New Market Towns

*Lucky Jewellery* is a big company owned by an investor from the Zhejiang Province. His daughter, the company's general manager, tells me her father went to Ruili and set up the company after watching a TV program about feicui 'betting stones' in

2008. In four big buildings, the company hosts a jade culture exhibition gallery, a carving workshop and a carving school, a big department store for feicui jewellery, and a hall full of 'betting stones' and cut stones, many of which are priced at several million *Yuan*. In 2015, the company had 138 staff members, the managerial positions all occupied by people from the Zhejiang Province.

Since 2009, Lucky Jewellery has also hosted a biannual auction (*gongpan*) of feicui stones. While there are also auctions in Yingjiang and Tengchong now, the general manager says this is the only auction in Ruili and the first of its kind in Yunnan. Sellers bring feicui lots bought at the emporium in Myanmar, and she said the auction might be delayed in 2015 due to the military conflict in the Kachin State. Most buyers are big traders from from Ruili, Yingjiang, Tengchong, Kunming, and the Guangdong Province. "Chinese people love gambling", she says, "So there is a big market for betting stones". The seller lists his minimum price for each lot. Bidders must bid above the minimum price. Unlike the jade auctions I attended at Bonham's in London and Bruun-Rasmussen in Copenhagen, the auction practice here is *closed bidding*. Buyers write their bids and put them in a closed box. The highest bid wins. A plaque in the company reads:

> Betting on raw jadeite is a commercial entertainment with mystery and risk. The following rules are formulated in the principle of publicity and fairness:
>
> 1: Jade is special for its indeterminacy. Jade is commercially risky. You are expected to consider carefully before betting.
>
> 2: If you buy jadeite, you should pay before gaining the stone, and are not allowed to return after leaving.
>
> 3: We guarantee the authenticity of the jadeite. We will accept the return of the jadeite without conditions if it is identified as fake by the authority organization.
>
> 4: The Company is not responsible for winning and loosing of your betting.

The Lucky Jewellery Company takes 3 per cent of winning bid prices in commission, but must also officially pay 3 per cent in taxes to the government. But the company also earns in a less obvious way. When traders arrive with their lots, they sell some good pieces to the company at discounted prices. Bought at the emporium in Naypyidaw, the stones have been taxed in Myanmar. A further import tax is levied in

Jiegao, when the stones enter China. This tax is 34 per cent of the price listed on the papers issued after taxes have been paid in Myanmar. The general manger shows me a big hall full of betting stones and stones that have been cut open. These stones were brought here by Burmese traders, and have not been bought at the emporium. Most of them have not been taxed in Myanmar, nor in Jiegao, which effectively makes them illegal. They are smaller than stones sold at the emporium and auction. The general manager says the local government 'looks the other way' with regards to such smaller untaxed stones, because the feicui trade brands Ruili and attracts buyers and tourists, who support taxpaying businesses in the city.

The Lucky Jewellery Company has played it safe recently. They mainly buy stones that have been cut open, because skin-covered betting stones are too risky. Also, they do not rent mines in the Kachin State, because the political situation is unstable, and her father fears the government may change its policies. In the department store, high-quality feicui jewellery is exhibited with serial numbers and certificates of authenticity issued by the Ruili Testing Station of Dehong Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision, an agency under the City government. The general manager says some stalls and street vendors in the bazaar may sell counterfeit feicui with fake certificates of authenticity, but that the city government supervises big companies like theirs, which never sell counterfeits. She says that 2008 to 2013 were very profitable years in the feicui business, but that the anti-corruption campaign has slowed down trade since then. From 2009, the business was so good that many restaurant owners and hairdressers sold their businesses to do feicui trade. Some people also mortgaged their house for bank loans to raise start capital. She says bank loans carry interest rates at 8-9 per cent, while interest rates in the private lending market are 20-30 per cent annually. Lucky Jewellery has 7 staff members, who travel around to check prices, quality, and supply of feicui in markets in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, and send back reports to the company.

In 2015, the Lucky Jewellery Company markets their products on a webpage and an official WeChat account. They also have adverts in Kunming and Mangshi airports and in an airline magazine. Further, they have *guanxi* with officials in Ruili's City government, who promote the company to travel agencies, because they do not sell counterfeits, and their prices are fair. They give 5-10 per cent of the sales price on purchases to the tour company. Feicui companies from other provinces buy their jewellery wholesale, and they have many returning customers; most are businessmen, who buy high-grade jewellery 'to show off' or as gifts to friends, wives, and girlfriends. "Jade is a luxury product", the general manager says. "It is like a Louis Vuitton bag.

But it is more complicated than a Louis Vuitton bag. It takes a long time to know about jade".

She says the Internet is changing the trade now. Everybody can do feicui now; you just take a picture of somebody's stone or jewellery, post it online, and take a cut of the profit. Also, the market is complicated. Prices for high-grade feicui are very high and keep rising, but both supply and demand is low. Her father is considering the company's strategy. They are currently not buying new stones, but just sell out of their inventory, while watching how the market develops. They will go to the US this year to see if there is a possible market for feicui there.

*The Delong Market* is located a few hundred meters from the Lucky Jewellery Company. Finished in 2014, the Delong Market hosts hundreds of companies, as well as an outdoor night market for jade. Following the market slowdown in 2014, trade at the Delong Market picked up from 2016. Mrs Yan, a private investor, owns the market and sells and rents out the buildings to companies. Most buildings have four floors. The ground floor hosts the shop and sometimes a carving workshop, and the remaining floors are often used as residence. Some companies also have carving workshops or offices on the 2nd floor, while the 3rd floor is used as living quarters and the 4th floor hosts a kitchen and dining room in most buildings. A 4-floor building costs around one million *Yuan* to buy. There are 28 blocks in the Delong market, each with around 40 buildings, which makes 1120 individual 4-floor buildings and thus 1.12 billion *Yuan* if Mrs Yan sells all houses. In 2015, the annual rent was 60-70.000 *Yuan* for a house, which makes around 70 million *Yuan* in annual rent if all houses are rented out. In 2018, both purchase, and rental prices were rising and most buildings were occupied. The hundreds of street stalls that fill the market at night each pay 500 *Yuan* monthly. Mrs Yan offers low prices for the stalls, because she wants the market to be lively, which will attract more customers. More customers mean more business, more purchases and rental fees for the houses, higher prices, and more income. Some traders, who moved into the Delong market in 2014 had in 2018 resold or rented out their house, cashing in a profit. Not only feicui, but also the buildings and markets from where it is sold thus became investment objects that can gain and loose value, depending on how the market develops.

Mr Huang opened the *Prosperous Jade Company* at the Delong Market in 2014. He let me use his spacious office on the 2nd floor, which is equipped with a brand new iMac set on a large desk, and a set of carved mahogany furniture – a bench, three chairs, a large teatable, and a bookshelf with publications on feicui. Mr Huang never used the office and the iMac was empty aside from model pictures of his daughter

wearing top-grade feicui jewellery. Opposite of the office is a meeting hall with 28 chairs encircling a rectangular table. All furniture is in carved, red mahogany. The wall is adorned with two Chinese flags and portraits of Mr Huang and seven of Ruili's master carvers. On the 3rd floor are a kitchen, dining room, and two rooms, where visitors can sleep over. The ground floor hosts the company's exhibition room, where visitors, clients, and customers gather around a large teatable. It has a minimalist design with high-quality materials. The floor is covered in black stone tiles, the walls are whitewashed, and the room illuminated by built-in spotlights. Along the walls are exhibition cases, which host top-grade feicui jewellery and carvings made by local master carvers. Many pieces are franchised, which means the company has agreed about a price with the carver, and can pocket any amount above that. Mr Huang also owns several pieces, which were left over after he closed down the Many Gemstones Company in late 2013. One is a 60-centimetres tall incense vessel carved out of a single red ruby from Tanzania. It includes two interlocking rings, which are very difficult to carve and a sign of exquisite craftsmanship. There were originally two vessels, but Mr Huang says he sold the other one for 20 million *Yuan*, and expects this one to sell for 16 million *Yuan*. The two pieces took a master carver one year to make. In a guarded room behind the exhibition room are some of the stones from the company owner Mr Xu's mines in the Kachin State. This room has not been decorated. The stones speak for themselves.

## Exhibition Environments

While personal relationships remain important for traders of high-grade feicui, many companies that moved into the Delong market in 2014 made printed and online advertising, stylish interior design, and employed shop assistants educated in jade culture. Big companies carefully staged 'exhibition environments' for their feicui products. This attention to marketing and market environments contrasts with the shops, stalls, and street trade of the bazaar and the position of old-generation local Yunnanese traders, who insisted that the most important in the trade is feicui itself and your knowledge about the material.

I took guided tours in different large feicui companies (see Chapter 7). The guides had years of training and/or working in the feicui business. For example, two shop assistants, who guided me through the Golden Jewellery Company, had studied for three years at a jewellery school (*zhubao xuexiao*) in Tengchong, specialising in jade

culture and business, rather than jade carving. Shop assistants are almost exclusively female, while most carvers and carving students are male.

The tours exhibited the 'face' of the companies, and were carefully designed, moving from cheaper jewellery on the ground floor to more expensive jewellery and figurines in secluded areas of the first floor or on higher floors. Prices thus increase along horizontal and vertical lines of the building, and the tours projected a 'sorting out' of different feicui pieces based on their economic value. Feicui jewellery was grouped together in batches with similar prices, often physically separated into 1) jewellery in the price range of some hundreds, up to a thousand *Yuan*; 2) from one thousand to ten thousand *Yuan*; 3) from ten thousand to a hundred thousand *Yuan*; 4) from a hundred thousand to one million *Yuan*; and 5) above one million *Yuan*. Cheaper feicui pieces were placed side by side beneath a glass counter, whereas more expensive feicui was exhibited in separate glass cases.

Shop assistants took out feicui pieces with a cloth and placed them on another cloth situated on the glass counter. They also used the first cloth to polish the jewellery to increase its shine, and used a flashlight to expose the translucency and transparency of the piece. As noted, glasses with water are often placed inside the exhibition cases. In the Prosperous Jade Company, Mr Huang placed a clay jar with water in several exhibition cases. The local Dai people use this clay jar for drinking water, and it is customary for ethnic Dai to place this jar outside their houses, so travellers can stop and drink water. Mr Huang also had leaves from the Bodhi tree placed in feicui exhibition cases containing, which projected a relation between jade and Buddhism. The Bodhi tree is important in Buddhism, as Buddha (Suddharta Guatama) is said to have attained enlightenment meditating under this type of tree.[40] Mr Huang further had sand and reclaimed wood from the Ruili River placed in exhibition cases, creating a rustic 'natural' environment for the feicui jewellery. Such attention to exhibition environments was primarily a feature of newer large jade companies in Ruili, while feicui pieces in the Zhubaojie jade bazaar were usually just placed side by side behind glass counters or, in the case of expensive pieces, kept in locked safes and only exhibited upon request.

Anna Tsing (2013) discusses the 'sorting out' and 'assessment work' of Matsutake mushrooms. For Tsing, "Thinking through assessment allows us to consider how the

[40] *Bo* is a Singhalese corruption of the Sanskrit *bodh*, meaning enlightment (Nicholl 1988: 227). The teachings and practices of Buddhist schools are attempts to contribute to Bodhi/enlightenment. In the course of many rebirths, individuals may accumulate *Karma*, which avoids cleaving to, and craving things. The result is "an emancipation of the individual possessing this *Karma* from the Wheel of Birth and Death", which is called *Nirvana* (Fung [1948] 1976: 244).

commodity form can be made without industrial labor through a process of translation" (ibid: 23). We may likewise consider the sorting out of feicui into price categories, and Mr Huang's design of exhibition environments that forge symbolic relations between feicui and the 'purity' of water, the 'Buddhism' of Bodhi leaves and the 'ethnic minority culture' of Dai clay jars as one way of 'purifying' feicui as commodities without industrial labor.

## Online Trade: An Elephant Cannot Fight the Ants

In 2013, traders said feicui prices had been rising explosively since the 1990s, where you could buy high-grade stones for a few thousand *Yuan* that could now be worth hundreds of thousands of *Yuan*. During the boom years, feicui also attained a character similar to financial products. A friend told me about a man, who married a famous Ruili jade trader's daughter, and started a feicui company in 2006, which grew fast due to the father-in-law's financial backing. In 2008, the company advertised on its webpage that if clients bought feicui from the company, it would repurchase it after one year with a 3 per cent price increase, a 5 per cent price increase after two years, and 7 per cent after three years. This scheme was based on expectations that prices would keep rising. But after the market slow-down from late 2013, the company cancelled their repurchasing scheme, where buying feicui was similar to receiving fixed interest rates from money in the bank.

Writing just after the 2008 financial crisis, Thomas Naylor's (2010: 132) description of global gemstone markets may also apply to China's feicui markets: "In recent years demand has skyrocketed, prices along with it, as a growing number of people with rising incomes face a fixed geological stock, while the taste for physical finery spread down into formerly excluded economic strata […] The nouveau riche sought conspicuous social symbols to match apparent economic success, something that the current financial crisis may or may not curb – while a market meltdown by itself might reduce demand, it might also spark a flight from orthodox financial assets to less conventional ones". When other investments become risky, some consider gemstones a safe container for economic value. When one gemstone market sector deflates, investments are diverted to other markets, as in the rising investments in amber and online trade of low-grade feicui after high-, and mid-grade feicui markets declined.

In 2018, the Prosperous Jade Company was closed down, and Mr Huang was preparing to start up online *Zhibo* trade of opals and feicui. His partner from Hong Kong leases opal mines in Australia. Huang says he is very rich, and shows me a screenshot of the partner's Bank of China bank account on his mobile phone. It syas there is 1.8 billion *Yuan* on the account. The Hong Kong partner will invest 60 per cent in the business and Mr Huang and his nephew will each invest 20 per cent. Doing Zhibo trade, the seller and buyer each pays 2 per cent of the transaction to the Zhibo Company. Huang's nephew Mr Yu has worked in IT for 5 years, and manages the online infrastructure, which involves getting traffic to the Zhibo account. He calls it a 'networking technique', and it works for example by placing adds and links in online computer games that direct players to Zhibo accounts. He also does this service for other traders for a fee of 3 per cent of their sales. He can check the traffic and income of Zhibo companies in Ruili, and says there are currently 10 of them making 2 million *Yuan* per day. The annual revenue from feicui trade in Ruili was 20 billion *Yuan* in 2017, he says, and Zhibo trade accounted for 6 billion of that. Given that Zhibo trade of feicui in only took took off three years ago, he feels it will be a very good business, but that they have to move fast. The trade has inserted Chinese Zhibo operators as middlemen between Burmese suppliers and Chinese buyers, and a friend told me tBurmese traders in Mandalay are angry, because this lowers their profits.

Mr Yu well exemplifies well the intensity and speed of wealth in some areas of reform-era China's market economy and the questions about values it poses. Aged 19, he developed an app for online gambling on soccer matches and made two million *Yuan* in four months. He was scared, because gambling is illegal and he feared being arrested. He went to Germany to study IT for two years, but spent a lot of the time traveling around Europe and gambling in casinos. Back in China, he worked for a company in Beijing, but lost most of his money from investing in the stock market. His girlfriend left him and he became depressed, and hardly spoke to anybody for two years. His parents are wealthy and live in Spain, and he only sees them once a year. His parents always pressured him to become rich, but after his depression, he feels his values changed. He invested in the Zhibo Company with Mr Huang because he wants to be financially independent for the rest of his life. His dream is to buy a big boat and sail around the world. He is now 26 years old and hopes he has enough money to realise his dream when he is 30 years old. "If the boat capsizes, I will die happy, because I died doing something I like", he says.

In 2018, there were two big markets doing Zhibo trade in Jiegao, while traders also used Zhibo at the Delong night market. Burmese traders bring their product to Zhibo operators, who need to speak fluent Chinese to deal with online buyers from other places in China. The Zhibo operator describes the type, quality, colour, cracks of feicui jewellery emphasising the good properties of the product. They do not need much knowledge about feicui. A trader says the problem with Zhibo is that you cannot examine the feicui with your eyes and your hands, so you cannot know its quality. It is also risky because there is no functioning legal system that makes sure you will get back your money if you receive a bad product or do not receive it at all. Personal trust is crucial in the trade. Breaking trust can be sanctioned in local markets, where jade traders know each other. But with the extended customer base in online trade, there are few available sanctions for breaking trust. If customers tell others not to buy from your Zhibo account, you can just make a new account. This trader is from a local family of feicui traders, and her father runs a shop selling high-quality betting stones. She says her father taught her to be honest, because your reputation is important in the feicui trade. But buying online, you risk buying counterfeits. For her, the original market makes much more sense. She says: "You should have knowledge about jade, otherwise you should not buy it. You need to examine the jade before buying".

Mr He, the former general manager of the Prosperous Jade Company, said he had told Mr Huang and Mr Zhao to invest in online feicui business when Zhibo auctioning became popular in 2015. "Now it's already too late to enter the Zhibo business", he said. Mr He is convinced that the Zhibo trade of feicui is just a fad, and will collapse soon:

> The Zhibo trade is not sustainable. The main problem is trust. People cannot get back their money if they buy bad products. Also, a lot of fakes are sold on Zhibo. Zhibo is only for low value jewellery, not expensive stones. Many online customers don't know jade, they cannot identify good quality. Nobody dares to buy high-quality products online. There is a huge lack of trust in the Zhibo trade, and the online business has become a symbol of cheating. So the Zhibo business damages the reputation of the jade business. But with 1.4 billion people in China, there is a high customer base, so people can still make a profit for some years.
>
> I told Zhao and Huang to start Zhibo trade in 2014. Their company was big, so if they had started early, they could have defined the business. In 2014, there were no cheaters, so they could have defined the rules of the game, and the followers would

> obey the rules. They could have defined Zhibo as a high-quality product online auction. But now it's too late. An elephant cannot fight the ants. There are just too many small traders now, so they will win the game. You cannot sell high value stones on Zhibo now, because consumers do not trust the products anymore.

Mr He still sells feicui on WeChat. He also advertises his friends' feicui pieces for a middleman profit, and helps friends buy good pieces. The Prosperous Jade Company building was empty in 2018. Mr Zhao still had big stocks of high-quality feicui stones. Sometimes clients come to examine stones, but nobody buys anything. Mr He explains: "The economy changed, there is not enough cash flow in China now. Buyers lack money. Mr Zhao has three exceptional stones now, very expensive. But you cannot buy jade on credit, so you must have a lot of cash to buy high quality stones".

## Jade Carving: Art, Craft, and Computer Drawing

Based on technology, skills and reputation of the carver, and the materiality of feicui, we might separate jade carving into three categories: 1) Industrial production, 2) Craft, and 3) Art.

1) *Industrial production*. Computer-assisted carvings were made from low-grade feicui already in 2013. They feature sketchy carvings like the disc-shaped *bi* or simple Buddha designs on low-grade feicui material. The 'carver' makes the design in a computer-drawing programme, similar to AutoCAD. The computer is connected to a machine with an abrasion drill, under which he places a flat piece of cut feicui. Then the carving is made automatically, similar to 3D printing, except that this technology can only carve in one dimension (top-down abrasion). I talked to some of these carvers in the Zhubaojie bazaar. They had not received training in carving, but just copy-pasted online pictures of jade carvings into the drawing programme, and then made the adjustments they wanted. Their main skill was mastering the drawing-programme. Once a design was made, the machine could make hundreds of identical carvings from a similar material in a few days. Traders supply stones and order designs, and the computer operators usually take a few hundred *Yuan* for a necklace pendant carving. This technology cannot make very detailed carvings. As the machine does not have any conscious interactions with the feicui, the design is enforced upon

the material, rather than the carver mutually interacting with the materiality of feicui to 'bring out' its best qualities.

2) *Craft*. The majority of jade carving in Ruili can be characterised as craft. It is done manually in workshops by small desks hosting an abrasion drill, different sizes of drillheads, and a tube with running water that is sprayed on the feicui during carving. Some workshops work all night. Most workshops areattached to a family-owned feicui shop, and employ local youth for fixed salaries of around 3.000 to 4.000 *Yuan* monthly. Some carvers had been apprentices in other jade companies and a few had taken a 3-4 years degree in jade carving from jade schools in Ruili, Jiegao, or Tengchong. The schools usually offer programmes in 1) jade culture and business and 2) jade carving. I interviewed the headmaster of a jade school in Jiegao, which had 500 students. 14-17 year-old students, who have graduated from upper elementary school pay a 4800 *Yuan* fee annually, whereas students, who have graduated from high-school (17-19 years old) pay 9800 *Yuan* annually. But many carvers in the private carving workshops are learning-by-doing. They receiv guidelines from the leading carver in the workshop, and then start working on low-grade materials, gradually moving to higher-grade feicui as their skills improve. It usually takes some days to make a necklace pendant, but can take weeks for more demanding carvings. The craftsmen usually carve jewellery into forms with cultural meanings like Buddhas, round discs, bamboo tubes, and beans.[41] The jewellery is sold in shops, and increasingly online via WeChat and Zhibo.

3) *Art*. Some carvers make jade carvings that are considered artworks by means of matching the materiality of particular stones with ideas and concepts in the design and skilful execution in the carvings. There are more than 1000 feicui carvers in Ruili, but only around 10 master carvers, whose work is widely considered art, and has won prices from Jade Associations and at Jade Exhibitions locally in Ruili, provincially in Kunming, and nationally in cities like Beijing and Guangzhou. I became friends with one of these master carvers, and interviewed six of them. All six were from Eastern China, and had moved to Ruili to start up carving workshops and business, as the jade market started booming. Ruili's most famous master carver is Wang Chaoyang, who has won many jade carving awards, and whose pieces are collectors' items. A

[41] Each carving template has different meanings, including luck, protection, health, prosperity, and often refer to Han Chinese art, and literary tradition. For example, a jade pendant carved as 'the old fisherman' (*yuweng*) refers to a story: A sea bird tried to eat a mussel. The mussel closed its shell upon the bird's bead, and after some hours, both of them died. Then the fisherman took both. The lesson is the story is that a third party can benefit from a conflict between two parties, and the jade carving pendant would its wearer the same luck as the fisherman.

trader said a working hour of Wang could be as much as 10.000 *Yuan*. Wang Chaoyang lived in the same residential community in eastern Ruili as Mr Huang. Wang worked from his villa, which also functioned as a school for his 10 apprentices. Wang is from the Henan Province and graduated from the Central Academy of Art in Beijing. He started out carving nephrite jade, but switched to feicui, when he moved to Ruili in 1997. He was 44 years old, when I first interviewed him in 2013. Besides from Wang Chaoyang, I interviewed the master carvers Liu Dong from Fujian province; Lian Lian from Jiangxi province, Xianxian from Henan province, Xu Yanping from Fujian Province, and Duan Hua Zhu from the Henan province. Xian Xian, Xu Yanping, and Lian Lian had all attended the Central Academy of Art in Beijing some classes under Wang Chaoyang, and came to Ruili after Wang had established a successful business there. They all referred to Wang respectfully as their 'teacher' (*laoshi*). Xian Xian, Xu Yanping, and Duan Hua Zhu set up business and residence at the Delong Market in 2014; Lian Lian set up a workshop opposite the Delong Market; and Liu Dong opened a company at the adjacent Jinxing Market, which also opened in 2014.

Duan Hua Zhu was the only woman considered a master carver in Ruili. She says carving demands physical strength, but that she is more focused on details than male carers. Carving also demands many working hours, which make it a difficult job for women, who are expected to take care of their family in China. She now has 5-10 students every year. They study for 2-4 years, depending on how fast they learn. But she feels students are not focused enough these years. Carving is hard work, and now some leave after a short time to do Zhibo trade, which is a faster way of earning money. She was previously master designer and teacher at the Lucky Jewellery Company and had 20-30 students at a time. That time, the students were more hardworking and eager to learn the craft, she says.

All master carvers have apprentices, in most cases between 5 and 10. The students usually live in the house of the master carver, and they eat and work together like a family. The organisation varies. In 2015, a new regulation had been introduced that students should pay an annual fee, which was often around 10.000 *Yuan*. Meanwhile, some students also get a salary, aside from lodging and food. The salary varies with the skills and speed of the student, but usually range from 3.000 to 10.000 *Yuan* monthly. The master carver owns the carvings they produce and appropriates the profits of their sale. Most students are locals from the Dehong Prefecture, and some are from eastern China. Having been trained by a master carver with a name is an advantage for when the students will later set up their own businesses. Some of the

master carvers also gave classes at the local jade schools. Many of them academically trained, the master carvers incorporate philosophical and art historical ideas into their work and thinking about jade (see Chapter 7). Some master carvers also work on other materials than feicui, as in Xu Yanping's carving of bricks (fig. 17). Here, it is the carving art more so than the material itself that creates value.

Top-quality feicui is carved into jewellery, which better realises the value of the material. The task in carving jewellery is to *expose* the inherent properties of the feicui material in as favourable and undisturbing way as possible. Jewellery includes cabochons set in fingerrings, bracelets carved from a single stone, beads of similar size and shape set in a necklace, as well as necklace pendants, and earrings. Carving top-quality feicui demands the eyes and skills of a master carver. It also requires high investment capital if the carver is not commissioned by a trader, but buys the stone himself. The carver may buy stones at the government-organised jade auction in Myanmar or in markets in Ruili, or a trader brings stones to the carver. Carefully examining stones, the carver looks for their potentials. If there is only a narrow ore of feicui in the stone, he will likely opt to make cabochons, if the ore is wider, he may be able to make a bracelet. The proportion and curve of cabochons is crucial, as the colour shine will decrease if the dome on a cabochon is too high. Different colours and inclusions in the material can add or decrease value in the carving, depending on how he incorporates them into the design. In jewellery of top-grade feicui, designs should be simple, clean, and refined; like a perfect piece of calligraphy made in a moment by a balancing of body, mind, and material, but manifesting years of practice.

Lower-grade feicui affords greater artistic intervention, and can be carved as detailed figures of, for example, Buddha (*Fo*) or the Buddhisathva *Guanyin*. Most carvings work through abrasion into a flat slab cut from a stone. Bracelets are drilled out from flat slabs cut from feicui boulders. Once the disks are formed, smaller circular saw bits are used to cut the inside diameters of the bracelet, and the edges are polished round. Large elaborate figurines or landscape sceneries are usually carved from low-grade materials. Here, value derives more from artistic labour than the material itself. Such carvings require considerable overview in matching design ideas with what the materiality of the stone allows for, which is only revealed gradually as the carver works his way into the stone. He might envisage a mountainous scene. Working his way into the stone, he may encounter a streak of green and use this to convey a forest, which then has to be matched proportionally with an ore of white

that he might use to make a cloud, and so on. The larger the stone, the more unpredictable the carving process will usually be.

17. Brick carving by carver Xu Yanping (reproduced with permission).

## Opacity, Visibility, and Recursivity of Value

Two large feicui boulders weighing around six tonnes each were excavated from one of Mr Xu's mines in the Kachin State, and transported to the Prosperous Jade Company office in Ruili. Several windows were opened in their skin, revealing transparent, green, and pink 'glass type' feicui, the most expensive feicui type, in both stones. Being able to include three colours of 'glass type' feicui in a single bracelet is rare, and will make up for a very expensive product. Mrs Hou, the company manager, described them as 'once in a lifetime stones'. She said a jade boss in Shanghai would buy one of the stones for 600 million *Yuan*, almost US$ 100 million. He would exhibit the stone intact at his company in Shanghai to attract clients for his other feicui. He might open more windows in the stone, but would not have it cut and carved, and would thus not realise its potential value. Below, I discuss such display of potential value and more generally the feicui market in terms of opacity, visibility, and recursivity.

First, we may consider a tension between *opacity* and *visibility* and between *withholding* and *releasing*. Keeping the 'meat' of the stone *opaque* or making it *visible* can influence market prices. Even if the Shanghai investor eventually cuts and carves the stone, putting a lot of high-grade feicui on the market all at once can cause price falls, also for his other feicui, as price is contingent upon perceived scarcity. That is, *if*

the stone is full of high-quality feicui. Nobody knows until it is cut and carved. Traders *withhold* and *release* feicui and information at certain times to influence and speculate in price formation. As noted in Chapter 3, traders in Ruili withhold or release feicui depending on prices at the Myanmar emporiums. Also, as issuing of gemstone licenses in Myanmar were officially suspended by the National League for Democracy (NLD) from 2016 to 2018, many mine operators in the Kachin State withheld stones pending a governance review that would decide whether their licenses would be renewed. Also prices are productive information that influences prices on other stones. We have seen how the Lucky Jewellery practiced 'closed betting' auctions, while the 'opacity' of prices is perhaps most 'visible' in Myanmar, where jade traders clasp their hands underneath a table or a cloth, using a hand sign system to negotiate prices.[42] Clifford Geertz (1963: 36) described the 'bazaar-type market' as "a system where economic conditions are unstable, market information poor, and trading hyperindividuated". Feicui traders can profit from an unstable and opaque market by speculating in when, where, and to whom to release certain products and information. Feicui stones are themselves opaque by means of their surface skin. Their prices are formed according to what people believe hides underneath their skin, and traders profit from signifying them with their words.

Secondly, Mrs Hou's suggestion that the big feicui stone would attract buyers for the Shanghai investor's other stones indicates that economic value was kept potential in this stone to actualise it in other stones. A similar *recursive* perception of wealth attracting wealth manifests in feicui boulders exhibited in lobbies and dining halls of upscale hotels and restaurants, which by creating an aura of luxury justify high prices. It also motivates some company owners to carefully design feicui exhibition environment. Attention to market environments and advertising contrasts with how some older Yunnanese traders, who sell feicui worth millions of *Yuan* from quite shabby-looking shops, argue that professionals only look at the feicui material itself. Criticising a semiotic positing of consumption as a form of 'language', Colin Campbell (1994: 348) argues "objects can be meaningful without having a symbolic meaning". Rather than seeing feicui exclusively as symbolic matter, I propose a contingency between feicui, market environments, and traders that can manifest both as congruity and incongruity, similarly to what I observed in the case of genuine and counterfeit luxury goods, markets, and vendors in Shanghai (Møller 2010: 80-82,

[42] I witnessed this system of price negotiation at the jade market in Mandalay. H. L. Chhibber reported on this practice at the feicui mines in Kachin State in 1934: "in sales and valuations prices are not mentioned openly, but are indicated by a conventional system of finger pressures under cover of a handkerchief" (Chhibber 1934, in Hughes n.d.).

115-118). For buyers without product knowledge, a Louis Vuitton bag risks being considered counterfeit when sold by a rural Chinese in a Shanghai bazaar, as does feicui sold by a Burmese vendor in Ruili's Zhubaojie jade bazaar. Similarly, as Cindy feared, wearing jade Buddha jewellery without being knowledgeable about Buddhism risks inviting accusations of being a fraud. As Ferguson (1999: 207) argues, signification "is complicated and messy; sometimes it simply fails". Conversely, exhibiting a 6-tonnes feicui boulder in the Shanghai Company may raise consumers' valuation of feicui that might be valued lower in other markets.

David Graeber (2001) posits value as potentials that are realised when made visible and thus meaningful by being "assigned a place in some larger system of categories" (ibid: 41, 45). Following this approach, exhibitions are ways to realise potential values of feicui by staging visibilities. Julie Chu (2010) discusses the visibility and accounting of temple donations in Fuzhou. While scholars have seen public displays of ritual expenditure in China as a way for worshippers to gain 'face', Chu argues that the ultimate summation of donations was rather seen as a general statement of the *ling* ('divine efficacy') of the gods. Chu (p. 137) writes:

> More than simple tautology, the circularity of ling might be better described here as a kind of centripetal force drawing devotees, divine power and prosperity together through an ever broadening and reinforcing cycle of opulent displays and miraculous manifestations. Numbers attracted more numbers. Crowds enhanced the public staging of ling. Ling brought in more temple devotees and donations. More donations meant more lists of sums crowding temple steles and posters.

Perhaps a similar recursive principle is at work in exhibitions of big feicui stones, and more generally in 'heating up' the feicui market? Exuberating potential value, exhibited stones attract customers, whose purchases add wealth to the owner, allowing him to buy bigger stones, and so on. If so, staging visibilities of wealth and value through feicui stones seems less a case of Veblen's 'conspicuous consumption' than a matter of attracting wealth as a multiplying force that works through relations between people and things, somewhat similar to how expenditure on *haute couture* by Congolese men in France manifests 'life-force' in staged displays upon their returning home (Friedman 1994). Rather than 'symbolising' status for jade traders, we might see their projections of wealth through high-grade feicui or luxury cars as means to attract clients, partners, and co-investors in new feicui stones, who will bring more wealth, similar to how exhibition environments and 'modern' feicui markets are

constructed to attract clients and investors, who want to partake in a self-reinforcing 'wealth-force'.

There is a recursivity to investments that attains particular intensity in a country of 1.4 billion people, who are subject to the same culture, media, and political system. The feicui market is similar to stock, and real estate markets. Massive investments in one type of commodity draws more investments in an escalating cycle, creating a market bubble that will often eventually deflate, as happened to some sectors of the feicui market in 2014. Jinghong Zhang (2014) uses Lévi-Strauss' binary of the 'raw' and the 'cooked' to discuss how Yunnanese Puer tea is transformed from the 'natural' to the 'cultural' through roasting (p. 109). The characteristic fermented ('cooked') Yunnanese Puer tea was rediscovered by Taiwanese and Cantonese consumers in the 1990s, and underwent a period of intense economic speculation in the 2000s until the market crashed in 2007. Zhang analogises the technical and physical 'stir-roasting' of Puer tea that influences fermentation and taste; the metaphorical 'stir-roasting' that 'heats up' Puer tea towards human values of taste, culture, and health; and what tea traders called 'stir-roasting' (*chao*) the tea market, which signified economic speculation. After the market crash, some observers said the temperature of 'stir-roasting' had become too high and that Puer tea had become 'overcooked' (p. 119-120). Tea and its processing is thus 'good to think', and became a metaphor for an 'overheating' Chinese market economy that in the current era has manifested in market bobbles that span from real-estate to tea and jade.

After the Puer tea market crash, some participants countered calls for stronger, clearer, and more scientific regulations and supervision of production and market with appeals for a return to the 'raw' vague state of Puer tea (Zhang: 115-120, 158). Zhang describes this arena of competing claims about authenticity and value as *jianghu*. In early use, jianghu had meanings of reclusion and individual liberty. The term was later popularised in Chinese martial arts fiction, where jianghu was depicted as a utopia, in which Chinese knights-errant travel around, compete in martial arts, and "go beyond the political control of the court" (p. 24). The singularity and complexity of Puer tea engenders multiple valuation parameters and invites cultivation of personalised knowledge for tea growers, traders, and consumers, as feicui does for carvers, traders, and aficionados. Atttempts to determine 'authentic' Puer tea via tasting events failed to produce consensus, and Zhang argues that "faced with the risky *jianghu* of Puer tea, one must depend upon one's own tasting skill in order to discover authentic tea" (p. 162, 165).

As noted, older local Yunnanese said real feicui traders only look at feicui itself. Like Duan Hua Zhu also the carver Xu Yanping complained that carving students now left their apprenticeship to do zhibo trade of low-grade jewellery, because they could make more money this way. "Carving jade takes a long time to learn", he said, "You must get to know and appreciate feicui. But now people just think about how to make money in the market". Similar to Zhang's Puer tea case, we could see such comments as calls for a return to the 'raw' or 'opague' vague state of feicui before it became too 'visible' and 'overcooked' in the market. This 'raw' indeterminate demands deep human engagements with, and knowledge about feicui, as opposed to following investment fads and new market technologies. But in China, numbers are power. As Mr He said, "an elephant cannot fight the ants".

Thirdly, wealth is often transformed into force, or power, through *sacrifices* or *losses*. Discussions of Chinese ritual economy point to how forces like wealth must be continually maintained through ritual acts and expenditures, rather than being a matter of linear accumulation. Displaying a US$ 100 million stone without realising its value can be seen as an example of what Bataille (1985) called 'non-productive expenditure', where "the accent is placed on a *loss* that must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning" (ibid: 118). A classic example is Mauss' discussion of the *potlatch* among northwestcoast Native American tribes, who gifted and destroyed wealth in rituals "with the goal of humiliating, defying, and *obligating* a rival" (ibid: 121). Bataille also notes that the *sacrifice* of a fortune is necessary for the constitution of the 'fascinating character' of jewellery (ibid: 119). Being able to sacrifice a fortune on a stone without immediately realising its value positions you as a 'big boss' in the jade world, which may attract more people, business, and wealth to you. In the next chapter, I discuss purposes and performances of guanxi relations and interactions, which likewise can bring wealth through expenditures, exchanges, and reciprocities that is often realised as 'delayed return'.

**18.** One of three official bordergates between Jiegao in China and Muse in Myanmar. Photo by the author.

# 5. Congruity: Materiality and Social Relationships

> Some people [in China], their lives are without soul. They think a friend is someone, who can help you. Their spirit is indigent, so they pay attention to money, fame, and face. If someone wants to get close to you, maybe he just thinks you are useful. It doesn't mean he wants to be real friends. He calls it friendship, but it's just a mutually beneficial relationship. For example, two people can hate each other, but they pretend they are good friends for mutual benefit.
>
> We can just follow the rules of the game. The rules are: Make more 'friends'. If someone flatters you, maybe what he says is not true. It's like a surface, no real substance. You can remember what people tell you, but don't take it seriously. You should have your own ideas, don't let other people control your mind. I find that the younger generations [in China] are more honest than older people.
>
> - 25 year-old female gemstone trader in Shanghai

Like internal content cannot be inferred with certainty from the surface skin of feicui stones, 'interiorised' properties and relationships of people cannot necessarily be inferred from their 'exterior' social faces and interactions in China. A Chinese friend sent me the message above as part of a conversation about the Chinese relationship and interaction form called *guanxi*. The message represents well how especially some younger informants conceive of guanxi.

My friend characterises guanxi as instrumental, and sometimes superficial, insincere, and insubstantial. As she suggests, what people say to each other can feel "like a surface" with "no real substance", and some statements should not be taken seriously or literally. She further diagnoses quests for money and social 'face' (*mianzi*) as deriving from a lack of 'spirit'. Some informants posit the difference between guanxi and friendship as a distinction between interaction as a means to an end, and interaction as an end in itself. But you often need to make, maintain, and master

guanxi to get things done in China. As my friend suggests: "We can just follow the rules of the game".

Scholars have examined the importance of personal relationships and social networks for establishing the trust necessary to conduct economic transactions in markets in China and other (post)-socialist countries, where the rule of law and contractual relations do not take precedence (e.g. Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002; Yang 1994; Ledeneva 2008). Ruili's Chinese traders conduct feicui business through relationships and networks that are maintained in leisure arenas like restaurants, KTVs, spa baths, and tea saloons more so than in company offices. While interactions in KTVs rarely involved deep conversations, drunken men would commonly tell me we were 'brothers', *xiongdi*.

Kinship appellation is a common means of specifying social relationships in China, and meeting strangers involves determining proper appellation based on factors like age and status. The social 'brotherhood' of xiongdi can carry substantial reciprocal expectations. Mr He, for example, said he got his job as general manager in the Prosperous Jade Company, alongside five per cent of the company's profits, because his father and the company owner Mr Xu are xiongdi, which here characterises a long-lasting friendship. But xiongdi can also be applied to drinking partners with whom one does not expect to maintain a lasting social relation.

In China, exteriority and interiority is sometimes posited as contrastive qualities of intentions, interactions, and society, where the exterior is deemed hollow, superficial, and false, as opposed to an authentic, substantial interior (Bunkenborg and Bregnbæk 2017). This is the case in my friend's diagnosis of excessive concern with face and money as corresponding to a lack of spirit. Here, *mianzi* ('face') as an exterior social surface maintained by, and presentable to interaction partners is in opposition to *jingshen* (spirit), *liangxin* (conscience), and *ganqing* (feeling) as more interiorised moral properties, sentiments, and relationships of people. Likewise, kinship appellation among non-kin can be a polite or playful social form without substantial content. In other cases, the exterior and interior can develop in consonance. This is the case, when the 'surface' interaction form of guanxi allows for more sincere non-instrumental sentiments to develop. Also, an interior 'potential' (*qianli*) for influencing people, and social and material conditions of life may manifest as *mianzi.* Thinking through exteriority and interiority may be productive in considering how Chinese businessmen morally order, operate, and position themselves in networks that underpin markets. Congruity can encompass contradistinctions. Here, I pay particular attention to congruity between materialities and social relationships.

In this chapter, I first briefly outline culturalist and institutionalist approaches to guanxi. Secondly, I discuss how guanxi matters in economic fluctuations in Ruili's gemstone markets, as feicui can mediate guanxi relations that take the form of bribery. I then present some examples of how guanxi can forge reciprocities and trust that facilitate business transactions in non-contractual markets, and consider how male guanxi interactions are mediated both by women, who contribute to the masculine 'face' of Chinese businessmen, and by materialities like cigarettes, alcohol, and tea. Finally, I discuss how one feicui trader navigates between 'exteriorised' guanxi relations and 'interiorised' friendships.

## Culturalist and Institutionalist Approaches to Guanxi

Translating as relationship or connection, guanxi characterises ways and purposes of performing certain kinds of social interactions, relationships, and networks in China. Reform-era guanxi scholarship has taken two main directions (see Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002: 9-17 for a review).

First, *'culturalist'* accounts posit guanxi as an essential element of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy; a particular practice and understanding of persons and social relations deeply rooted in the Chinese psyche. Here, Chinese personhood is posited as collectively minded; an open-ended process constituted in interactions, as opposed to a more self-enclosed, private Western individual engulfed in its own thoughts and feelings. As noted in Chapter 2, Bunkenborg's (2009) study of health and personhood in rural north China suggests that interactions and exchanges that make up persons not only involve other persons, but also material things and spirits. Performing concern for the wellbeing of others permeates social interactions in China, and my fieldwork interactions in Ruili typically involved distribution and consumption of food, alcohol, tea, and cigarettes in groups. Chinese sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1992: 95) discussed how Chinese society is composed of overlapping networks of people linked through differently categorized social relationships. Self-orientations towards collectives and a focus on social harmony are in some analyses seen as accountable for psychological acceptance of authority and dependence among Chinese people (see Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002: 11). Social harmony was re-emphasised especially under Hu Jintao's presidency from 2003 to 2013 to address social stratification resulting from market reforms. Mayfair Yang (1994) suggests that prevalence of guanxi at the expense of the rule of law in

contemporary China is rooted in early Confucian discourse on a ritualised state and society that placed social relations, as opposed to a rationalised, objective legal system, at its centre. Current corruption may be seen here as linked to 'guanxi culture', rather than as deriving exclusively from economic organisation.

Secondly, *'institutionalist'* accounts focus on how guanxi emerges from a particular set of social institutions that exist in China, but also elsewhere, and that there is nothing fundamentally Chinese about the phenomenon. Here, guanxi is not essentially different from networks and gift economies in other societies, which makes guanxi a comparative phenomenon. The task, then, is to understand the institutional configuration of society that causes practices like guanxi to prevail in China. During the Mao-era, the use of guanxi relations and networks was a way to circumvent formal procedures to obtain goods and services in short supply, similar to *blat* in Russia (see Ledeneva 2008). In this analysis, participants in socialist economies were systemically induced to conduct transactions in the 'second economy' (see also Verdery 1996; Sampson 1987). In Western legal terms, such transactions would often qualify as corruption or bribery, but participants may downplay their calculative aspects by positing them as guanxi or 'gifts'. While guanxi may decline in some domains during changes in legal and commercial regimes, it has become a prevalent means for creating trust and clientilism among business partners, and between businessmen and government officials in the reform-era (Yang 1994, 2002; Osburg 2013). Currently, guanxi is employed to acquire a range of resources, from jobs to building permits and loans, and to secure mobility in an uncertain social and economic terrain.

In these two positions, we may detect echoes of formalist//substantivist debates among economic anthropologists and sociologists. Substantivists focused on how economy is embedded in social institutions, ranging from the household to religion, while formalists saw concepts and tols of mainstream economics adequate for understanding non-Western economies (see e.g. Hann and Hart 2011: 56-71; Granovetter 1985). The emphasis on historical continuity of guanxi as embedded in Chinese culture and personhood levels culturalist approaches somewhat with substantivist positions, while institutionalist approaches to guanxi are more in the line with formalist positions, insofar as they assume that similar economic organisation forms may allow a utilitarian economic rationality to manifest in similar ways. Aspers *et. al.* (2008) discuss trends in mainstream economics, which, by departing from neoclassical ideas about universal 'full rationality' and 'perfect market information' in

recent decades have drawn the discipline closer to sociological and anthropological 'embeddedness' arguments.[43]

Rather than either//or, I see institutionalist and culturalist approaches as complementary ways of explaining how guanxi matters in the feicui trade. An institutionalist approach best explains short-term fluctuations in demand for feicui in China according to government policies and national economic growth, which, assuming a utilitarian economic rationality, may produce similar effects in other contexts. Meanwhile, a culturalist approach to guanxi as historically embedded in Chinese personhood and socialities - and thus as more than economic rationality – better answers why guanxi remains prevalent in China's current market economy. Institutional factors like policies and economic growth may make impacts relatively fast, but culture changes at a slower pace.

## Jade and Guanxi

In November 2015, I was seated by a tea table in an alleyway jade shop in Shanghai with a group of jade traders. The traders discussed risks and opportunities of different investments. This was after a growth of more than 150 per cent in Shanghai's stock market between June 2014 and June 2015 was followed by a crash that saw the Shanghai Composite Index fall by more than 20 per cent in August 2015 after a similar plunge in July. According to a report by the European Parliament (2015), Chinese investors had lost around 5 trillion Euros in the stock market crash by September 2015. The owner of the jade shop was convinced that his stocks would regain value with time. His daughter, on the other hand, had not invested in stocks, because she felt the stock market is like a gamble. "It is much safer to invest in jade", she said, "Jade will always keep its value".

Chinese feicui markets have fluctuated precipititously in recent years, not unlike other sectors for frantic investments in China's market economy, such as stocks (Hertz 1998), real estate (Ulfstjerne 2017), and tea (Zhang 2014). A decline in some feicui market sectors from late 2013 highlights the role of guanxi in Chinese economies. Ruili's traders say expensive feicui is commonly 'gifted' to government officials in return for favours or resources, and that officials use feicui to launder

[43] Granovetter (1985: 482-483) expressed a 'middle-position' between subtantivism and formalism thus: "The level of embeddedness is lower in nonmarket societies than is claimed by substantivists and development theorists […] but this level has always been and continues to be more substantial than thought by formalists and economists" (ibid: 482-483).

money. While guanxi interactions are functional in establishing trust and reciprocities in the feicui market, feicui itself is thus a currency is guanxi relations.

Ruili's markets are highly diversified in terms of types, qualities, sizes, and prices of feicui; level of processing; style and value of carvings; technologies and environments for marketing and sales, and so on. It is therefore difficult to generalise about market developments, because they do not occur homogeneously and simultaneously in *one* market. What I could note was this: In summer 2013, Ruili's feicui markets were bustling with out-of-town customers and tour groups, and prices and demand rose for most feicui types, while markets were almost devoid of customers, and traders reported declining demand, when I returned to Ruili in 2014. A culturalist analysis cannot explain this market recession, because Chinese buyers liked feicui for the same reasons as before. Ruili's traders ascribed the recession to two factors: 1) The slowdown of economic growth in China, and 2) Xi Jinping's nationwide anti-corruption campaign. An institutional explanation for market fluctuations is thus more suitable.

First, China's declining economic growth has made people cautious about spending money. China's annual GDP growth was 14.2 per cent in 2007, but dropped to 9.2 per cent in 2009, as foreign demand for Chinese products sharply declined following the global economic crisis in late 2008. China's real-estate market had seen average housing prices triple from 2005 to 2009, but as the government imposed taxes on property ownership above two properties, many people redirected their capital elsewhere from 2009. Ruili's traders agree that feicui demand and prices boomed from 2009. Rising demand for feicui thus coincided with a recession in real-estate markets. Due to stimuli packages after the global recession in 2008, China's economy recovered short-term, but dropped from around 12 per cent in 2010 to around 7 per cent in 2015, the lowest in 25 years. In the context of declining economic growth in China demand in some feicui market sectors dropped from late 2013.

The second reason is Xi Jinping's nationwide anti-corruption campaign, an institutional factor regulating China's 'guanxi culture'. Inititated in 2012, the campaign had seen 201.600 officials prosecuted in court by April 2015 and over 1 million cadres 'disciplined' by October 2017.[44] As part of the campaign, over 100 kilograms of jade was seized from General Xu Caihou, former vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission, and former provincial governor Ni Fake was found to have accepted US$ 2 million in bribes, 80 per cent of which were in carved

[44] *The Atlantic* (7 April, 2015), *Wall Street Journal* (19 December, 2016), BBC (23 October, 2017).

jade, while mining tycoon Li Huan was accused of paying off government officials with jade (Global Witness 2015: 37). Ruili's traders say that due to the anti-corruption campaign few officials dare to buy expensive feicui to launder illegally obtained money or to receive it in return for favours and other resources.

A diversion of investments from jade to stocks and other gemstones, like amber, from late 2013 highlights the influence of institutional factors on economic demand. As Van Schendel (2002: 662) notes: "States may outlaw certain flows, giving rise to subversive economies, or they may encourage them, giving rise to state-nonstate alliances. Flows may suddenly change course as a result of events such as war, economic crisis, or collapsing consumer demand". Compared to assets like real estate, the compactness and size of feicui makes it easy to transport and confer a high monetary value. As Naylor (2010: 132) notes: "In their role as financial assets, gemstones have particularly desirable characteristics. High in value relative to bulk, they are easy to hide and to smuggle; they are universal and very liquid; and they can be sold via marketing networks whose members share an affinity for "discretion"". Much demand today is for 'investment gemstones': "That has been true not simply in time of crisis, but increasingly over the last three decades or more as money sought a stable home in something reputed to maintain and increase value more reliably than stocks or bonds" (ibid.). Feicui jewellery costing some thousands or tens of thousands *Yuan* is usually worn, but feicui pieces above a hundred thousand *Yuan* are typically economic investments expected to gain value over time. Feicui bought by, or given as bribes to government officials are usually investment stones, and declining demand in this sector is, according to traders, a direct result of the anti-corruption campaign.

Ethnic Chinese Mrs Zhang was born in Taungyi in Myanmar's Shan State, and studied in Mandalay before moving to Yangon to participate in her family's trade and currency exchange. In Burma's socialist period, her family did underground cross-border trade, buying products like juice and clothing in northern Thailand and selling them in Myanmar. Zhang married a Yunnanese man, and they moved to Ruili, where her husband did jade trade, while she started up a currency exchange. Burmese traders buy Burmese *Kyat* for Chinese *Yuan* they earn from selling products like seafood, rice, timber, jade, and other gemstones to Chinese buyers. Chinese traders, in turn, buy *Yuan* for *Kyat* earned by selling processed goods like machinery, electronics, and clothing to Burmese buyers. Mrs Zhang also holds reserves of Thai Baht, Hong Kong Dollar, US Dollar, and Euros. Some jade traders need Euros for the 50.000 Euro deposit required to participate in the government-organised gem emporiums in Myanmar. Due to her husband's jade business and her currency exchange for jade

traders, Mrs Zhang knows who jade buyers are and what they do with their purchases. She explains:

> Feicui is a good investment. This ring [a feicui ring on her finger]… I bought this ring five years ago for 30.000 Yuan. Now it's worth 200.000 Yuan. You see, government officials only earn around 3.000 Yuan per month. So many of them steal money from the government. They use the money to buy jade, use jade to launder the money. Then later they sell the jade and tell others their money is from jade. Government officials are the biggest jade customers. But they have too much money, they need to make it clean, so they pay too high prices for jade. So jade prices keep rising, the prices are actually too high now [in mid-2013]. Many businessmen also use jade as gifts. For example, if a businessman wants to set up a factory and need a government official to help [with permits], the official will not accept money, but will accept jade as a gift. Then later he sells the jade for money.

Fluctuations in China's feicui markets manifest redirections of capital flows in contingency with economic conditions and policies. Recessions in some sectors lead to investments into others. A crude model of how capital flows into different 'value containers' in China could look like this:

| Year | Economic growth | Factors | Container for value |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2000-2005 | High economic growth | Manufacturing for global market | Chinese export products |
| 2005-2008 | High economic growth | Stimulating domestic consumption | Real-estate |
| 2009 | Economic recession | Global economic crisis; declining foreign demand for Chinese goods; restrictions on real estate ownership | Jade |
| 2012-2015 | Economic recession | Anti-corruption campaign, military conflicts around the feicui mines | Stocks; amber, other gemstones |
| 2015-2018 | Economic recession | Anti-corruption campaign; Stock market crash; Investments abroad (BRI). | Different market trajectories for different jade, and gemstone categories |
| 2018 - | Economic recession | Trade/tariff war with the US; Online auctioning of gemstones (*Zhibo*) | Low-grade gemstones |

**19.** Economic fluctuations and conversions of capital into different 'value containers' in China, 2000-2018.

Different types of feicui undergo different market developments. Feicui prices at the emporium and total export value to China were exceptionally high in 2014. But this does not mean all that feicui has been sold to end consumers. Traders may sit on much unsold stock. Data from Myanmar Gem Enterprises places the percentage of 'Imperial grade' feicui sold at the 2014 emporium at 0.005 per cent with an average

price of 871.809 US$ per kilogram, 'commercial grade' feicui at 6 per cent at 2.675 US$ per kilogram, while 'utility grade' feicui was 94 per cent of sales at 204 US$ per kilogram.[45] In 2014-2015, traders in Ruili said 1) demand for high-grade feicui declined, but that prices kept rising; 2) that both demand and prices of mid-grade feicui declined; and that 3) prices for low-grade feicui decreased, but demand increased.

According to the average price calculations, Imperial grade feicui was 4273 times more expensive than utility grade feicui at the 2014 emporium. Due to its high price, imperial grade feicui is more likely to be used as bribes and to launder money, and therefore more likely to experience declining demand due to the anti-corruption campaign. But Ruili's traders also said high-grade feicui is scarcer as the mines are depleting, and we have noted how the war in Kachin State since 2011 diminished supply in some periods. This (perception of) scarcity may explain why high-grade feicui prices kept rising in Ruili in 2014-2015. The decline in disposable income due to China's economic slow-down may account for a diversion from commercial-, to utility-grade feicui as jewellery for end consumers, while abundance of utility-grade feicui and competition between suppliers could be a factor driving down prices in this category.

| Feicui type | Imperial (top) grade | Commercial (mid) grade | Utility (low) grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| Demand | Declining | Declining | Rising |
| Price | Rising | Declining | Declining |

**20.** Market development for feicui categories in Ruili in 2014-2015.

Ruili's traders responded to the market slowdown in various ways in 2014. Many jewellery shops closed down, but this was in some cases also in response to a rising online trade that rendered physical shops redundant for low-quality feicui. Some traders shifted from expensive to cheaper feicui. As noted, Mr Huang shifted from jewelry to high-grade betting stones after he made guanxi with the mine owner Mr Xu. From 2015, Ruili's gemstone markets seemed to diversify, and cheaper materials like amber, agate, tourmaline, and Huanglong jade gained popularity, while markets for low-grade feicui jewellery were booming with the rising popularity of online auctioning when I returned to Ruili in 2018.

While an institutional approach may explain declining demand for Imperial grade feicui in 2014 as a result of institutional regulation of illegal transactions entailed in

[45] https://openjadedata.org/Stories/how_much_jade_worth.html

guanxi relations, guanxi has not been eliminated with China's introduction of market economy. Guanxi underpins both legal and illegal transactions, and cannot be reduced to the function of circumventing laws and facilitating business transactions. As noted, guanxi comprises economic rationality, but also more widely sociality and personhood. Below, I examine guanxi in terms of interaction, exchange, and masculinity.

## Riding a Guanxi Network

As I enter a noodle shop in Ruili, Mr Zhang, a private school manager, invites me to eat with him. Zhang's father and brother have come down from their native Sichuan Province, and tomorrow he is taking them to *wan* ('play') in Tengchong, a city four hours north of Ruili. *Wan* encompasses different social interactions and activities, including sports, dining, drinking, and sightseeing. Therefore, I am not sure what Zhang has in mind, when he invites me to go wan with them in Tengchong, but I accept the invitation. Before leaving, Zhang gives me three packets of 555 cigarettes. 555 is a British brand not commonly smoked in Yunnan, which is famous for its tobacco production and cigarette brands. As Zhang does not smoke, I infer that the two cartons of 555 he is carrying are what we could call 'guanxi cigarettes', which are given to people with whom you want to establish a beneficial relationship.

Next morning, Zhang picks me up in a 4WD Toyota SUV with a jade talisman dangling from the front window, which supposedly protects against accidents. I wonder what happened for Zhang? Last year, he drove an electric scooter, and this car must be well above 200.000 *Yuan*. On the backseat is Zhang's father, a chainsmoking farmer with a friendly, wrinkled face, and Zhang's brother, a middle-school teacher. The climate shifts as we drive north. It is cold here, the smoke of roadside bonfires blends with the morning mist. Farmers are on their way into sugarcane fields. Some men stand in the fields and shoot birds with slingshots; an old hunting practice among Jingpo people here.[46] We drive through Longchuan County, which hosts a big Jingpo population. Drug-use is widespread here. At a police checkpoint at the exit of the county, vehicles are sometimes searched for drugs. But the police just check my

[46] Ideally, hunting is a strictly masculine endeavor among the Jingpo. A Jingpo hunting party in a mountain village outside Ruili told me they maintain taboos against women doing their laundry one week before the hunt, and against having sex with their wives the night before the hunt. Still, some Jingpo teenage girls confessed to a friend of mine that they sneak into the mountain to practice slingshot hunting, and are at least as skilled with the slingshots as their male peers.

passport, and let us drive on. Zhang says his company does not have a school in Longchuan, because people here are poor. Tuition at the schools is 300 *Yuan* for 16 weekend lessons a month. They teach English and other subjects to 4-12 year-old kids. Zhang is manager for the company, which operates a school in Ruili and one in Jiegao, each with 150 pupils, one in Lianghe with 100 pupils, one in Mangshi with 150 pupils, and one in Lincang with 50 pupils. The teachers earn 3-4.000 *Yuan* monthly.

Zhang stops by the school in Lianghe, and swiftly directs me to a classroom, tells the children to pose for a group photo with me, snaps a picture, and hurriedly leads me back to the car and drives on. I feel reduced to a face. Last year, Zhang took me out for dinner in Ruili several times, before inviting me to his school in Ruili, where he presented me as their 'foreign teacher' to a classroom full of parents and children, even though I had not taught there. Later, parents handed over a pile of cash to cement their children's inscription in the school. Zhang later invited me to Mangshi, where I taught four classes in his school. The main point, however, did not seem to be my teaching, but rather the carefully staged group pictures after each class, which he used in advertising the school.

Arriving in Tengchong, we have a big banquet with some 20 other guests, who are teachers with their spouses. Later, our group visits a museum of the Sino-Japanese war and a mountainous park, before going back to Tengchong for another lavish banquet. A friend of one of the teachers joins us. Wearing a giant ruby ring, he looks like a businessman. When introduced, he and Zhang simultaneously draw a packet of cigarettes from their pockets like Lucky Luke would draw his gun. As neither of them smokes, no cigarettes are actually exchanged. But the cigarettes and the intention of giving them are publicly displayed as vehicles for their potential future guanxi relation. After dinner, we go to a hot spring hotel. Along the walls of the hotel's marbled lounge are rows of feicui boulders set on carved mahogany holders. The material display of value indicates steep room prices. The rooms are spacious and spotless, and downstairs is a big spa area. Our whole group is installed with free access to the spa and Zhang's encouragement to order room service and anything we want in the restaurant. Zhang is paying, as he has been the whole day. What is his purpose in paying for all of this? And how does he get the money to do it? I shall find out the next day.

Next morning, we all go to a jade market in Tengchong, where we are greeted by a woman, who was part of the group yesterday. I assumed she was a teacher, though the Audi Q-5 SUV she drove contradicted that assumption. I ask Zhang who she is. "Oh,

that's my wife", he says. Although affection is rarely displayed publicly in China, I am surprised. She was with her son yesterday, but neither Zhang, nor his father or brother interacted with her or the boy. Also, Zhang slept at the hotel, but his wife and son did not. As it turns out Zhang's wife is a jade trader, and she leads us to her shop, where the women in our group examine her products. Zhang's wife sells at least two feicui pendants, a feicui bracelet, and a gold necklace. The transactions are conducted in lowered voices within the female group, but from looking at the products, I estimate she received 30.000 to 40.000 *Yuan*.

We then drive to a mountain village an hour from Tengchong, where locals have set up stalls, offering jade, amber, pre-communist money bills, herbal medicine, and tiger paws. The jade looks counterfeit, its colors are too shiny and even. Zhang orders a barbecued boar for lunch. Men and women sit in separate groups. The men talk about China's economic development, and seem pleased that the Danish *Krone* and the Chinese *Yuan* have an almost equal exchange rate, which indicates to them that the two economies are on an equal level. After lunch, the other teachers go back to their hometowns, and I go back to Tengchong with Zhang and his family. We park at a newly constructed, gated compound and go to a 3-bedroom flat, which turns out to be Zhang's home. Last year, Zhang lived at the teacher's dormitory at the school in Ruili, and I did not ask about his personal life. I doubt Zhang's school business can pay for their cars and the flat, so I assume his wife's jade business is going well. A local from Tengchong, she may have good connections.

Interactions in our group the past two days have been friendly, but also polite and formal. Zhang has coordinated our activities, shown us local attractions, distributed cigarettes, made toasts during banquets, paid all bills, and conversed with members of the group. In the flat, this frontstage sociality is replaced by backstage family life. Zhang's wife prepares a footbath for Zhang's father, and his brother has his arm around Zhang's son. The atmosphere is intimate and informal; it is like everybody can relax again. Later, we go to town, where Zhang's wife buys pants, jackets, blouses, underwear, socks, and matching belts for Zhang, his brother, and father, laying down 3.500 *Yuan* in cash. She gifts me a belt and a jade talisman similar to that in Zhang's car. Zhang's investments into a lavish guanxi weekend must have paid off, and his wife's shopping spree converts money earned from the morning's jade sales into gifts expressing affection and filial piety in the family. After dinner, Zhang takes me to a hotel and pays the bill. He says he gets a discount, because he has guanxi with the hotel owner.

Zhang has arranged for his friend, Mr Jun, to give me a ride back to Ruili tomorrow. He is going to Ruili to *wan* anyway. Jun picks me up in a Toyota sedan. He operates a kung fu school in Lincang, eight hours east of Ruili. But the school is not his primary income. He invests in real estate with loans from the local government. Chinese entrepreneurs often depend on government agencies for access to loans and permissions, and rather than a class "spawned by an unruly, latently democratic market that potentially poses a threat to Communist Party rule", many entrepreneurs "actively seek ways to forge closer relationships with state officials" (Osburg 2013: 9). Relations between entrepreneurs and officials are prototypical guanxi relations in contemporary China. Jun explains: "You have to give presents to government officials and treat them for dinners and drinking. Otherwise, they will not help you. Every day, people come to drink tea and discuss business at my office. Every night, I go out to drink alcohol. I treat people, or I accept invitations". Drinking tea and alcohol together constitute 'quiet' (*anjing*) and 'noisy' (*renao*) socialities in daytime and nocturnal arenas, respectively. Jun's life and work evolves around making and maintaining guanxi, and like other informants he says the daily banqueting, drinking, and smoking is bad for his health. He says businessmen also need to have good guanxi with the mafia, or they will extort money from you. But because some of Jun's former kung fu students are members of the black society in Lincang, he has a good relation with them.

Jun tells me he has three wives. They all live in Lincang, and he has a child with each of them. He is only legally married to one of them, who he refers to as his 'big wife' (*da laopo*). His considering the other two women wives seems based both on him having a child with them and on his economic responsibility for them. He pays for an apartment and living expenses for both of them, which seems a tacit agreement in relations between men and their 'second wifes' (*ernai*) in China. He says the wives know about each other. When his 'big wife' gives him trouble, he will stay with one of the other wives for a while. He also has several 'girlfriends' (*nü pengyou*), a relationship category with less economic responsibility. While he gives girlfriends gifts and pays for what they consume together, he does not have to provide them with a residence or money. We may consider both institutional and cultural explanations for the 'polygamy' of Jun and other Chinese businessmen.

First, an institutionalist analysis could posit Jun's relationships in terms of economic rationality. Zheng (2006) discusses how personal characteristics of men are used to evaluate their trustworthiness in business. Zheng's male respondents performed a 'cool' masculinity ideal, which involved deference, self-control, and

sexual prowess. For example, falling in love with a KTV hostess was seen a loss of 'cool' self-control that businesspartners considered risky, while having women fall in love with you gives you masculine 'face', which is instrumental in forging guanxi with business partners and officials (see also Osburg 2013: 61-75). Economy, prestige, and sexual relationships are intertwined in guanxi. Embodying his masculine attraction and economic ability to provide for them, Jun's multiple wives and girlfriends can give him 'face' that is instrumental in forging guanxi relations. Meanwhile, guanxi relations and the wealth they create are instrumental in 'acquiring' wives and girlfriends. This points to contingency, oscillation, and perhaps conflation between exchanges in what Westerners might separate as 'interior' private domains (residency, money, and gifts to wives and girlfriends) and 'exterior' market domains (loans from government officials) for Chinese businessmen.

Secondly, a culturalist analysis could point to historical continuities in Chinese sexuality. Zheng (2009) relates how male clients conceived of sexual relations with female hostesses in Dalian as an embrace of Western modernity and a rejection of restraints and emasculation imposed by a puritanical Confucianist-socialist system. The clients made an analogy between turning in their semen, or 'seminal essence' (*jing*), to their wives, and peasants turning in grain tax to the state. Zheng sees the clients' allocation of their semen between wives and hostesses as a 'mode of resistance' in order to retain an independent body, just as grain (*liang*) in the socialist era was 'misappropriated' by peasants, who rebelled by cheating the government of their taxes (ibid: 106). But clients' sexual practices also involved Taoist perceptions of self-cultivation and health, which posit seminal essence as essential for sustaining men's life and vitality. The clients felt that having sex with young women kept them young by nurturing their seminal essence, which can transform into life energy (*qi*) (ibid: 117).[47] Zheng's discussion of how new commodified sexual relationships have emerged in China's reform-era, which men posit as liberating and even rebellious, implies an institutional focus on how changing economic organisation forms afford changing sexual practices and meanings (see also Farrer 2002). Meanwhile, the Taoist conflation of sex and health is a historical cultural conception that manifests in new ways in the reform-era, where money earned from private business allows men to

[47] The idea builds upon a conception of yin and yang as in constant interaction. In sexual intercourse, the ideal situation for the male is to absorb female yin essence, while maintaining his male yang essence. For women, the reverse is the case. Kam and Edwards (1994: 139) use the term 'sexual vampirism' to describe the 'expanding capabilities' wherein a man maintains his original yang essence and a woman her original yin essence, while having "the potential to absorb additional essences that expand vitality and natural powers". This does not mean women *are* yin and men yang. Both sexes embody yin and yang essences at any time.

'nurture their health' through sex with younger women as an alternative to legal wives, who are often of the same age as men.

When we arrive in Ruili, Jun takes me to a restaurant, where we meet Old Wang, a kung fu teacher at Zhang's school. Assuming the host role, Old Wang orders food, and induces us to slam down glasses of rice liquor (*mijiu*). Old Wang pays the bill and says, "Tonight we will go to KTV" as a statement, not a question. I can see where this is going. Or rather, I cannot see where this is ending. I am still on a guanxi ride, and not sure how and when to get off. We go to Zhang's school, where Old Wang has ordered a wild mountain boar to be cooked for us. We eat and drink rice liquor, and then go to a KTV. Old Wang has booked a large room, where 100 Carlsberg beer bottles are set up in pyramid-shape on the table. Wang pays in cash. Other people arrive, including Old Wang's Jingpo girlfriend. Everybody sings, and we continually toast, repeating *kaixin, kaixin* ('happy, happy') as a mantra that self-referentially invokes an enjoyable atmosphere. As Jun drives me home, he invites me to a hot spring resort in Longchuan tomorrow. I tell him I need to work. The ride can continue for days, and I really need a break from the drinking. "But you have to come to Lincang", he says, "I will take care of everything". Before he drives off, he gives me a carton of *Yunyuan* cigarettes.

Two days later, Old Wang's girlfriend invites me for dinner with a group of Jingpo and Han Chinese government officials from Ruili's city government and the prefectural government in Mangshi. They say I just have to contact them if I have any problems, requests, or questions. More guanxi. We end up in a KTV again, following the standard script; singing, drinking games, toasts, exchange of cigarettes. A Jingpo official in the cultural department of Ruili's city government tells me she has been at KTVs every night in the past week, coming home drunk at 4 am, going to work at 8 am. She is tired, and has little time to take care of her 2-year-old son. But she has to do guanxi, she says, it is part of her job.

As this week has emphasized, guanxi is also a crucial part of my fieldwork. To experience how it is practiced, you join the ride, not knowing where it leads you. Me being delivered by Zhang to Jun, and then via Old Wang to his girlfriend and the government officials highlights a network straddling places like Ruili, Tengchong, and Lincang, and occupations like teacher, manager, real estate developer, jade trader, and government official. Being circulated in a network is a common feature of my role as a guest. In Yuanyang, I was delivered between different villagers every day, the host of the day gathering people in his inner circle of family, friends, and neighbours to eat and drink with the guest in his house. Also, when the jade trader Mr Huang is

busy, he often instructs someone in his network to take me out to eat and drive me home afterwards. Social activities that support guanxi relations, such as dinners, KTV visits, and trips, commonly involve someone taking the role of host, which includes paying the bills and tending to the well-being of guests. Leaving guests to be alone would be impolite and a severe neglect of the host role.

Guanxi comprises, but is not reducible to, economic rationality. As interaction, and exchange form, guanxi makes and specifies social relationships. Participants perform an ideal, or 'face', of intimacy in guanxi interactions, even if they may consider it pretence. It would be easier for Jun to just give money to government officials in return for loans for his real estate business. Instead he takes them out drinking all the time, even though he feels it detrimental to his health. The point of guanxi is to nurture relationships to keep them potent. Operating as a gift economy, guanxi creates reciprocities that work as value potentials, which are not immediately realised nor precisely speficied, as opposed to instant specification and realisation of value through money in impersonal market exchange, which makes future interactions superfluous. Zhang's investments in our weekend translated into purchases of jade in his wife's shop, which she later converted into gifts. Through conversions and delayed return, money paid for banquets, hotels, jade, and clothing came to specify 'friendships' and family affection.

Scholars have debated whether money transforms, or manifests culture. Simmel (2005 [1900]) posited money as a catalyst for a modern cognitive world of rational calculation, a transformation of social life from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. Simmel emphasises transformative potentials of money as a tool of commensuration, abstraction, quantification, and reification, which in some contexts renders money morally suspicious. Compared to the socialist era, new relationships are forged through money in reform-era China, as exemplified by the 'payment' for 'second wives' by entrepreneurs like Jun. But monetary mediation of intimacy and sex is not unequivocally seen as immoral in China. Osburg (2013: 180) notes that while the mixing of money, intimacy, and sex "provokes considerable anxiety among intellectuals worried about the power of money to corrode other systems of value, and among social scientists who posit separate spheres of exchange, many ordinary Chinese find this to be an inevitable and natural aspect of social life". Nor is this mix new. An obvious example is bridewealth, which has now risen to amounts prohibiting some Chinese men from marrying, partly as a result of China's deficit of women due to the one-child policy.

Rather than seeing money as engendering a particular worldview, Bloch and Parry (1989) emphasise "how an existing world view gives rise to particular ways of representing money" (ibid: 19). Block and Parry argue that the morality of money usually depends on whether is sustains or undermines wider social and cosmic orders. When invested in the reproduction of orders transcending the individual, such as the household or temples, money is not seen as disruptive or transformative in the sense Simmel imagined. The question, of course, is who defines those orders, and what they do and do not encompass. Jun's distinction between 'girlfriends' and 'wives' seems to encompass a distinction between a short-term order, associated with desire and consumption ('girlfriends'), and a longer-term order of wives and children that at least Jun himself posits in terms of moral responsibility.

While realized in the group picture with a 'foreign teacher' in the school in Lianghe, Zhang's investment in me was also longer-term. In December, Zhang asked me to act as Santa Claus for Christmas shows in his schools in Ruili and Mangshi. The children performed songs, and the evening was concluded with a Danish Santa Claus yelling "Merry Christmas!" while throwing candy to the children from the stage. Then I endured an intense hour of posing with children in my Santa Claus outfit, while their parents took pictures. I was weary of performing the role of 'foreigner' (*laowai*), but Zhang's investments in me had created guanxi between us, and I felt I could not reject doing him the favour. Obligations to reciprocate in guanxi relations are rarely made explicit. As Smart (1993: 389) argues: "For the gift to succeed as a gift, it must follow the social forms that usually prescribe that it be an unconditional offer of a prestation in which explicit recognition of instrumental goals is excluded from the performance". For Smart, the defining feature of gifting is in its performance (ibid: 394). Below, I describe how guanxi performances can evoke ideals of non-instrumental sentiments.

## Making 'Brothers' at the KTV

I got to know 'Flashlight Sister' through Mr Huang, who teasingly gave her that name because she sells the flashlights that all traders and buyers use to examine feicui stones. Flashlight Sister also trades feicui. In her mid-50s, she is the youngest of 8 sisters from a family of farmers and grew up in poverty, which might explain her preoccupation with money. Driving me home from banquets, she always comments on the wealth of other participants. She is very interested in my relationship with Mr

Huang, and asks me if I have been to his house and met his girlfriend - in effect if I know Huang 'privately'. She is also interested in my amber, and says I should import large quantities of Danish amber; she will hook me up with buyers in return for a middleman cut. As I tell her I sell amber as a hobby and am satisfied with modest profits, she is astonished: "What do you mean? You can become rich if you sell a lot of amber here. Who doesn't want to be rich? Everybody wants to be rich!"

Flashlight sister says she 'does not understand' (*bu dong*) feicui. But she is a local in Dehong and has an extensive network, both to an old generation of Yunnanese feicui traders and to buyers in eastern China. Her business is straightforward. When a friend has a stone for sale, she establishes his price, takes pictures of the stone, and sends them to her contacts in eastern China via the WeChat app. She adds her own profit to the asking price, and sometimes earns tens of thousands of *Yuan* on single deals. The feicui trade has made her well off, if not rich like Huang, and she supports her parents, who live in a three-building house encircling a courtyard in Lianghe. She also bought an apartment for her 19-year old daughter in Lianghe and a newly constructed apartment in Ruili, where she lives with her 24-year old son and his Thai wife from Chiang Mai. Like many feicui traders, she drives a 4WD SUV. Flashlight Sister is always stylishly dressed and wears expensive feicui jewellery.

One night, Flashlight Sister calls and tells me Mr Kun is in Ruili. She will give him my phone number, as she is in Tengchong. Mr Kun calls and asks me to meet him in a KTV. Flashlight Sister has treated me for dinners and trips in the past few weeks, and me accepting Mr Kun's invitation feels mostly like showing favour to Flashlight Sister, as I do not know Mr Kun well. I met him two weeks earlier via Flashlight Sister. They took me through a hole in the border fence to a casino in Muse for three consecutive nights. The casino was packed with Chinese clients carrying stacks of 100-*Yuan* bills for gambling on card, and roulette games, and all groupiers spoke Chinese. Mr Kun told me he has operated a casino in Macao, and now works for a 'big boss' (*da laoban*) from Beijing, who wants to set up a casino in Muse, as gambling is illegal in Mainland China. Such a business venture demands very substantial capital and guanxi with big players like black society, police, and local ethnic militias, if not the Tatmadaw.

Waiting for me outside the KTV building, Mr Kun pays my taxi bill and leads me to the lobby, where he offers the receptionists to take a selfie with the foreigner, before we take the elevator up to our KTV-room. Guanxi interactions commonly follow scripts that structure the unfolding of events, and comprise distribution and consumption of food, alcohol, and cigarettes, which performs both hierarchies and

commonalities. Mr Kun thus introduces me first to his boss, a short, skinny man in his mid-50s with bad teeth. The boss 'invites' (*qing*) me for a toast. I hold my beer glass lower than his, and he does not lower his glass. I am then introduced to three other men one by one. They all hold their glass lower than mine, which I counter with an identical gesture. This reinforcing display of deference can escalate until one glass is placed on the table. The beer glasses must be emptied in one swig (*ganbei*). Mr Kun then introduces me to a female teacher at Ruili's no. 1 high school, and says that unlike him and the other men, she 'has culture'. Next, he introduces me to the 'girlfriend' of his boss, a local Han Chinese girl, who does not appear to be more than 20 years old. The women hold their glasses lower than mine in the greeting toast. I give Yunnanese *Yunyan* cigarettes to the men from a packet that costs 40 *Yuan*, which I bought as an upgrade from the cigarettes I usually smoke, which cost 22 *Yuan* per packet.

People take turns singing. The applause is louder when the boss sings. But the best singer is his young girlfriend. She performs duets of Chinese songs, alternating between a deep male voice and a very high-pitched female voice. The boss looks content with the applauses for her performances, and I speculate that besides from her youth and beauty, also her singing skills contribute to his masculine 'face'. Osburg (2013: 65) writes that among elite male businessmen and officials in Chengdu, "the qualities of women who conferred the most status onto their male companions were well established and almost universally recognized". These qualities include youth (preferably under 25 years-old), purity (few or no previous sexual partners), beauty, artistic cultivation (for example singing ability), education, and high 'quality' (*suzhi*), indicated by "a combination of educational level, perceived morality, urban upbringing, and family background" (ibid.). Mr Kun's boss tells me he visits Ruili 4-5 times a year 'for business'. The 'girlfriend' seems a status object to him, and their relation is likely mediated by money. Ruili does not offer a wide variety of career options and has no university or vocational schools, aside from jade schools. Restaurants and hotels pay low salaries, and mainly employ Chinese-Burmese staff. Young women with parents in the jade trade may join this trade or invest in other businesses like restaurants, market stalls, or online trade of beauty products or clothing. But for those with little money, education, and connections, working as a KTV hostess or becoming a 'second wife' or 'girlfriend' of a rich man may be tempting.

In the KTV, we do both individual toasts and common toasts with all guests participating. Social hierarchy is performed in the individual toast, where the material

positioning of glasses ideally reflects social positioning of those toasting. Conversely, people do not lower their glasses in the common toast, displaying a more egalitarian commonality. The toasting continues for hours, until all men are drunk. Drunkenness usually marks a temporal point, where men invoke sentiments of friendship. We have noted an instrumentality in guanxi interactions. But participants downplay instrumentality when performing guanxi by invoking human 'feelings' or 'sentiments', *renqing* and *ganqing*. Mayfair Yang (1994: 70, 109) notes that guanxi has "ethical, instrumental, and aesthetic" values, while renqing discourse emphasizes "obligation and indebtedness" (in Oxfeld 2010: 47). Osburg (p. 23) suggests that though renqing has a positive moral connotation and guanxi a slightly derogatory one, the distinction between is often one of perspective and moral framing. Kipnis (2002) suggests approaching *ganqing* and *guanxi* – 'feeling' and 'instrumentality' – as a totality. He argues: "For *ganqing* to be effective, it has to be made discernable or concrete, to be materialized in some way. But this materialization is not simply a matter of making previously hidden feelings visible – that is, "expressing" them. Rather, it creates something not previously present" (ibid: 25). Rather than negating ganqing, Kipnis sees elements commonly seen as guanxi, like gift giving, banqueting, ritual, etiquette, and various forms of address, as ways of generating ganqing (ibid: 27). Kipnis' proposal that the social forms of an instrumental relation (guanxi) can be vehicles for creating human sentiment (ganqing) complicates a rigid mutual exclusion between the 'superficial' and the 'substantial'.

In the KTV, the drunk men assure me that we are 'brothers' (*xiongdi*), that they will solve any problem I may encounter, that we will go to KTV again tomorrow, that I am invited to spend Spring Festival in their family house, and so on. I have by now become so accustomed to guanxi that I do not expect these invitations to necessarily be actualized. Their significance seems to be their *performance* and *potential* for future interactions; the fact that they are made. Lubricated by alcohol, guanxi often slides into transient sentiments of affection. If we drink together again, our guanxi may grow stronger and we may develop deeper relationships. We need to approach Chinese informants' concepts inductively, as literal translation of emic concepts can uproot them from their semantic grounding, the contexts in which they are used, and the expectations they embody (Oxfeld 2010: 46). *Xiongdi* is a particular kind of 'brother', *guanxi* a particular kind 'social relation', and *ganqing* a particular type of 'human sentiment' in China. Taking informants' concepts seriously here involves embracing a notion that you can have affectionate 'human sentiments' and experience 'brotherhood' with someone you just met, while simultaneously strategizing on how

you can benefit from your 'social relation' with that person. What may seem contradictions in Western contexts are not necessarily so in China, and oppositions can appear flexibly as mutually constituting potentials, rather than as mutually excluding categories in China. Keeping up with the drinking until 2 am, I excuse myself. Mr Kun follows me down, hails a cap, and pays the driver for my ride home.

When I return to Ruili three years later, Flashlight Sister invites me to her home to drink honey-infused rice liquor with Mr Kun, informing me the liquor costs 1000 *Yuan* per bottle. Mr Kun seems to be doing well. He opened a casino in Muse with the Beijing boss, and they are now constructing casinos on the Lao border with Thailand. "All the signs there are written in Chinese, and we use Chinese *Yuan*. It's like being in China!" he grins. Such Chinese economic enclaves have existed for years in neighbouring Myanmar and Laos (see e.g. Rippa and Saxer 2016). But they are now spreading to countries like Cambodia and the Philippines, where Chinese labourers (often without work permits) construct and work in Chinese-funded casinos and other businesses catering to Chinese clients, while locals experience rising living costs and crime. The influx of illegal Chinese businesses, such as drug trafficking to the Philippines by Chinese gangs, has unfolded in conjunction with Beijing's conditioning of poorer countries with high corruption as something akin to vassal states through a combination of investments, bribes, intransparent loans, and political pressure. For example, as part of the BRI, China has secured exclusive access to ports in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Djibouti. It is easy to imagine such Chinese enclaves also coming to host illegal trades.

Mr Kun says the casino in Muse is going very well. They also launched an app for online gambling, which he says is even more profitable than the casino. This way, people can gamble directly from Mainland China. Previously, gamblers would sometimes send protégés to Myanmar and Laos to gamble for them, orchestrating the bets via phone. But with the app, they avoid risks of the protégé stealing their money or being kidnapped. Mr Kun shows me pictures of a handful of young women on his phone. They are all his girlfriends, he says. One of them is from Kunming and has a university degree. He considers making her his 'wife' (*laopo*), and shows me a feicui fingerrring he bought for 10.000 *Yuan* today as a present for her. Then he video-calls his legal wife, who lives in Guangzhou with their son, and gives me the phone. "Say something to them!" he grins. The foreigner says something to them, and gives the phone back to Mr Kun, who speaks a bit with them, before telling them goodnight. Flashlight Sister says, "now he has a lot of money, so he has a lot of girlfriends in different places!" She seems impressed with Mr Kun.

Flashlight Sister's own business stagnated, as there are few buyers for high-grade feicui stones now. She says most trade is done via Zhibo online auctions now, but that she does not know how to conduct this trade. The market shift from high-grade to low-grade feicui and from social networks to Zhibo auctions seems to have cut Flashlight Sister out of the game. The Zhibo trade is more than a new technology. If Zhibo traders succeed in monopolising the low-grade feicui market, it will mark a shift from a bazaar-type market based on social relations, networks, and face-to-face interactions to impersonal market transactions with a much wider pool of online buyers. While WeChat trade is also done online, your WeChat 'friend circle' usually comprises people you have met offline, making it similar to the stack of businesscards you received in Chinese markets 5-10 years ago. The Zhibo jade trade also seems to mark a generational and gendered shift. While jade shops in the Zhubaojie bazaar were operated as family businesses, a lot of young women do Zhibo trade in Jiegao. They do not need much jade knowledge. With a basic feicui vocabulary and their face, they can attract male buyers to their Zhibo accounts. Zhibo jade trade seems to entangle with what Osburg (2013: 143-182) calls the 'beauty economy' that constitutes women's youth and beauty as resources in high demand by wealthy Chinese men. Many 'beautiful women' (*mei nü*) now make a living from live broadcasting via Zhibo, as men pay a per-minute fee for watching them sing, dance, put on make-up, or eating noodles online on their mobile phones. This economy of youthful beauty is another factor working against older-generation traders like Flashlight Sister.

## Cigarettes, Alcohol, and Tea

By now, we should have gained some sense of how guanxi is performed. Social interactions do not occur in material voids. Below, I discuss how exchange and consumption of cigarettes, alcohol, and tea performs different relationships that can be placed in a continuum with hierarchy, formality, and social distance in one end, and commonality, informality, and social intimacy in the other.

First, we will consider how regional identity and social relationships are performed in *cigarette distribution*. A standard greeting and sociality among Chinese men involves giving and smoking cigarettes together. The most commonly distributed cigarettes in Ruili are of the Yunnanese brand, *Yunyan*. Production place of cigarette brand and local affiliation of cigarette giver usually corresponds, and some non-local

jade traders give cigarettes from their native province. But the only foreign cigarettes I saw distributed were Zhang's 555 cigarettes. In fact, Jun told me it was inappropriate for Zhang to give 555 cigarettes during our weekend in Tengchong. Wank (2000) notes that 555, which has been marketed in China for a century, was considered an 'old brand' (*laopaizi*) and smoked by businessmen, company managers and descendants of pre-revolutionary bourgeois business families in the coastal city of Xiamen in the late 1980s. Among the latter group, the brand signified the "symbolic capital of old-business family lineage, creating an aura of reliability and professionalism" (ibid: 273). While from a rural background, it is possible that as a manager, Zhang attempted to evoke these connotations with his choice of 555 as his guanxi cigarettes. But as a Sichuanese and a non-smoker, he failed to recognize the localist value of Yunnanese cigarette brands in Yunnan.

Yunnanese cigarettes can also mark local affiliation outside China. I made six trips to the village of Doi Pui near the top of the Suthep Mountain in northern Thailand. Most villagers are ethnic Miao, who migrated here from China's Guanxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan provinces at the end of the 19th century, while around 20 per cent of the villagers are descendants of Yunnannese KMT soldiers, who fled to Burma in 1950, and later settled here. Many of the Yunnannese are gem traders. In a jade store in Doi Pui, I met Mr Chu, an amiable old man, whose father was a KMT soldier. Once or twice a year, Mr Chu takes a rugged three-days busride through mountainous northern Thailand, northern Laos, and Yunnan to visit relatives in Kunming. During our conversation, I gave LM cigarettes to Mr Chu, but he did not reciprocate. I later met Mr Chu in a teahouse, a packet of *Yunyan* cigarettes on the table in front of him. I asked if he bought the cigarettes in Yunnan, but he changed the topic. As I was leaving, Mr Chu gave me the *Yunyan* cigarette packet. Inside was a packet of Marlborough cigarettes. Chu laughed roguishly and said that as a Yunnanese he prefers *Yunyan* cigarettes. He buys them in Kunming, but had finished his last packet. He apologised for not reciprocating the cigarettes I gave him earlier, as he feared the incongruity between his packet and cigarettes would make him seem an imposter (*pianzi*).

Increase in expenditure on cigarettes by a giver is congruent with increase in social status of the receiver, and often also with increased social distance between giver and receiver. Diversified tobacco quality is manifested in *Yunyan* cigarette packets costing 8, 11, 22, 40, 60, and 100 *Yuan*, respectively. In daily life, most people smoke *Yunyan* cigarettes costing 8, 11, or 22 *Yuan* per packet, which are also given to close friends and kin. When interacting with people socially further away from you in more

ritualised situations like banquets and KTVs, you usually give *Yunyan* cigarettes costing 40 or 60 *Yuan* per packet. Meanwhile, you will often give *Yunyan* cigarettes costing 100 *Yuan* per packet to high-ranking government officials or 'big bosses' with whom you want to establish guanxi. Particular kinds of cigarettes thus express both local affiliations and particular kinds of social relationships.

Givers usually take out the cigarette from the packet and hand it to the reciever. The giver should offer light to the receiver, igniting the lighter with the left hand and shielding the light with the right hand bended. The recipient bends both hands around the light and the giver's right hand. A Jingpo friend suggested this gesture is a re-enactment of how people sat around bonfires in the past. When the cigarette is lit, the recipient taps the shielding hand of the giver two times with his middle, and index finger as a gesture of gratitude. Failing to comply with these formalities can be slightly impolite. As a local twist, some men spice up their cigarettes with thin slices of fragrant sandalwood.

Cigarette exchange may be considered with both new materialist and institutionalist approaches. Rather than seeing cigarettes exclusively as *symbols* of local identity, status, and social distance, we could also focus on their *performativity* as effectuated by their *materiality*. Adam Reed (2007) posits cigarettes as *agents* of sociality and conceptualisation of currencies and value in a Papua New Guinean (PNG) prison. First, as incarceration is defined by waiting, inmates use smoking as an act of defiance, a consolation, and a moment of meditation that opens a gap in the time of ordinary experience, which is shortening time, killing their memory, and therefore changes their state of mind (ibid: 33-35). In that sense, inmates are "vitally acted upon by cigarettes" (ibid: 36). Without cigarettes, inmates say they would have no way of making friends, and smoking is thus "the constitutive form of sociality" in the prison (ibid: 37). Secondly, transactions in the prison are conducted with 'cigarette money', rather than with the currencies that work outside the prison. Like money, tobacco is seen to draw all objects into a common scale (ibid: 38).[48] Reed suggests that the national currency in PNG is conceptualized in terms of its divisibility. While traditional wealth items like pearl shells are single, non-divisible things whose exchange elicits a specific relationship, the capacity of notes and coins to display the objective attribute of a number encourages people to envisage all their relationships at once. This creates some anxiety, "a sense that debts must be returned

[48] A man I met in Myitkina in Myanmar said small bags of coffee, rather than cigarettes, functioned as money in a prison in Mandalay, where he served a 10-year sentence for murder. The small coffee bags, which make up one cup of coffee, were exchanged for cigarettes, food, and sexual services.

more quickly and exchange accelerated (ibid: 39). Unlike money bills with different numbers, a single cigarette is always 'one'. Its non-divisible quality and the fact that is specific to the prison as money form means cigarettes carry no record of debts and transactions outside the prison. Another crucial feature of cigarettes is that they are burned, which can lead both to deflation and periods of money shortage in the prison (ibid: 40).

Arguing against 'the hegemony of constructivism', Reed suggests that things can act and emit their own messages, and that prison cigarettes as fetishes are not animated by something foreign to them – human intention or social meaning – but by 'the spirit of matter' (ibid: 41). Like prison cigarettes in PNG, exchanging and smoking 'guanxi cigarettes' is a 'constitutive form of sociality' among Chinese businessmen. Especially in social situations with people you do not know well, lighting a cigarette without offering one to other participants is considered rude. The units of *cigarette*, *packet*, and *carton* can specify different relationships. First, giving *a single cigarette* is a *courtesy*, where you usually also take out one for yourself and share the social situation of smoking together for the 5-8 minutes the cigarettes afford. Few women smoked in Ruili. Many of those who did smoked the long, thin Taiwanese 520 cigarettes. The 'female' 520 cigarettes were incongruent with the 'male' *Yunyan* cigarettes, and women were not expected to exchange cigarettes with men. Secondly, *packets of cigarettes* can be gifts, but are more commonly a form of *sharing*. During banquets or KTV visits, men sometimes gave me a packet of cigarettes specifically for that night. Thirdly, *cartons of cigarettes*, like the one Jun gave me, are *gifts*. With Mauss' ([1925] 1990) discussion of how gifts retain traces of givers and Oxfeld's (2013: 52) emphasis on how *liangxin* (conscience) in China entails *remembering* and *acting upon* moral obligations, we can suggest that the carton afforded a wider material-temporal token for remembering my reciprocity with Jun than a packet to be smoked in an evening. Again, higher expenditure often signifies more formal and socially distant relationships. Smoking a cigarette without giving your interaction partner one can even manifest friendship. Newly established relations are usually marked by intense, even escalating courtesies, exchanges, and reciprocities, which de-escalate from formality into informality as your relationship deepens.

In line with Reed's approach, we can note how cigarette materialities matter in Ruili. Cigarettes carve out a temporal space for male bonding, and cigarette units specify different exchange forms and relationships, insofar as giving a single cigarette is a courtesy, giving packets is considered sharing, while cartons are gifts. The 'bigger' unit of cartons usually specify higher social distance and formality in relationships

than 'smaller' units of single cigarettes. If relationships deepen, exchange frequency, scale, and expenditure may be downscaled.

With a more insitutionalist approach, David Wank (2000) discusses how consumption and exchange of premium foreign cigarettes helps construct the networks within which private business in reform-era China operates, as well as power relations within those networks. Like Osburg (2013), Wank writes against arguments that access to goods and services in markets enhances autonomy from officialdom, portraying changing use of premium cigarettes under market reforms as changes in relational networks, which occur within the framework of an authoritarian state, rather than subverting it. Before market reforms, premium cigarettes were scarce and only available by using political capital or connections.[49] They were not acquired for personal enjoyment, but for their exchange value in influencing others, typically officials controlling allocation of centrally redistributed goods, services, and opportunities. But with market reforms, premium cigarettes became readily available. Once marking their users as members of the privileged cadre class, they came to signify commercial wealth among businesspeople. Wank sees premium cigarettes as a form of 'capital' that entrepreneurs use to enhance their business dealings, and as vehicles of domination for entrepreneurs to appropriate others' support for profit. In line with other institutionalist approaches, Wank sees the functionality of cigarette exchange in guanxi in relation to a commercial system that lacks the institutions of more established market economies.

For the new private entrepreneurs (*geti hu*), smoking premium foreign cigarettes became a 'symbol' of wealth and a 'metaphor' for emerging social distance to those in the public sector who were still smoking cheap Chinese brands. But cigarettes also specify relations within the business world. Wank notices a difference in status between people typically giving and receiving cigarettes. Smaller-scale entrepreneurs were more frequent givers than wealthier entrepreneurs, who usually have tighter relations with officialdom, and the wealthiest entrepreneurs often had personal valets giving out cigarettes for them (ibid: 274). Yunxiang Yan (1996) argues that gift-receiving, rather than gift-giving, generates power and prestige, as gifts flow up in the status hierarchy (in Gold, Cuthrie, and Wank 2002: 8). During our night at the KTV, Mr Kun's boss received numerous cigarettes, but rarely reciprocated. Big jade 'bosses' like Mr Huang commonly brought an entourage of staff members and

[49] In the early 1980s, premium cigarettes were only available in Friendship Stores and the overseas Chinese counters of department stores, and could only be purchased with special currencies such as foreign-exchange certificates and overseas Chinese certificates (Wank 2000: 269).

business associates to banquets and KTVs, who entertained guests and supplied them with cigarettes. This communicates both the vertical prestige of the boss and a more horizontal reciprocity that works through his staff. Rather than a privately enclosed individual, we may see Chinese personhood as a more open-ended process or confluence point of vertical and horizontal networks and relationships. If networks and relationships are intangible, communicative 'tracks', materialities like cigarettes can be seen as substantive vehicles effectuating them.

Secondly, like cigarette exchange, *alcohol drinking* can specify both formalised, hierarchical relationships and a more informal, egalitarian commonality. While drinking fiery rice, and corn liquor is common in villages and at some banquets, beer drinking is the most prevalent alcohol sociality in Ruili. Participants in banquets, KTVs, and nightclubs drink beer from small 5-10 centilitre glasses. In these arenas, beer is not for personal enjoyment, and you only drink in toasts, where you must down the glass (*ganbei*). The most popular beers in KTVs and nightclubs are foreign pilsners like Carlsberg, Budweiser, and Heineken, while Chinese brands like Qingdao, Snow Mountain, and Dali pilsners are drunken in cheaper establishments. The foreign brands, brewed on license in China, seem designed for *ganbei*, as most contain 2,5 per cent of alcohol, as opposed to 4,5 per cent in their countries of origin. A bar owner in Ruili told me several Chinese beer brands sold with an alcohol percentage of 2.5 in Yunnan have an alcohol percentage of 3.5 in eastern China. He said: "We Dehong people drink very heavily. We always *ganbei*, so the beers are not strong, otherwise we get drunk very fast. This is also why we *ganbei* from small glasses". The 'agential infrastructure' of low alcohol percentage and small glasses facilitate many toasts that do not make participants drunk too fast. Collective toasts counterbalance the stratifying performance of deference and 'face' through cigarette giving and positioning of glasses in individual toasts. You cannot reject a toast, and offering numerous individual toasts to someone in a higher social position can both be a way to achieve commonality through drunkenness and to re-position yourself through your alcohol tolerance (*jiuliang*), which contributes to masculine 'face'. Women may be excused from ganbei if they are drunk or get drunk easily.

The drinking style in KTVs and nightclubs is similar. Nightclubs feature a stage with a DJ desk, which also hosts shows of singing and dancing, occasionally with Russian, Turkish, or Korean dancers. Beneath the stage is a hall with tables, where groups drink together, but there is no dancefloor, and people do not dance. Groups usually order 12, 24, 36, 48, or 60 beers, which are put on their table. Groups usually comprise minimum six people. More people make up for a 'noisy', 'fun' and 'happy'

situation. Different nights unfold similarly. In KTVs, you make toasts, take turns singing, play drinking games (dices, 'stone-scissors-paper'), and around half an hour before closing time, loud techno-music is put on. This marks a gap in formality, where men and women dance with erotic gestures and drunken men will sometimes try to fondle female friends, girlfriends, or hostesses. In nightclubs, your group toasts and plays drinking games, while the DJ plays loud mash-ups of dance, house, and pop-tunes, mixed with dancing and singing shows on the stage. When people get drunk, they toast and drink with groups at other tables. While people solidify relations within a group in KTVs, nightclubs provide an opportunity for making new relations. At closing time, groups often go to eat at outdoor stalls by the creek or the Huafeng market, before driving home.

In 2013-15, some bars around Ruili's Guangmu Rd. hosted local subcultures. Some people drank Myanmar lager Beer and Myanmar ABC stout beer with alcohol percentages of 5 and 8, respectively. Here, the beer itself mattered more than the drinking style and purpose of getting drunk to create sentiments 'not previously present' (Kipnis 2002: 25). These beers have more taste and due to their high alcohol percentage you drink them sip-by-sip of larger glasses, rather than slamming down small glasses as you do in KTVs. In these bars, musicians born in the 1980s played northern Chinese folk rock and Jingpo folk songs with acoustic guitars and djembes. The bars provide an informal atmosphere to chat and laugh in. We often sat around tables on the pedestrian walk eating barbecued meat and vegetables (*shaokao*) or steaming bowls of rice noodle soup (*mixian*). Some participants contrasted this 'quiet' (*anjing*) informal drinking to the 'noisy' (*renao*) atmosphere in KTVs and nightclubs. A Jingpo bar owner said: "We like a quiet atmosphere, to drink beers and chat. You can't do that in the KTV". Here, we distributed cigarettes we smoked in daily life. Giving expensive 'guanxi cigarettes' would seem pretentious and specify a social distance that contradicted friendship.

Ruili's leisure arenas diversified from 2013 to 2018. In 2018, Ruili's nightlife scene had incorporated more Western elements. Some bars now sold European stouts, lagers, and weissbeer, while a handful of restaurants served steaks and imported wines. Such places attracted Ruili's elite youth. Many were children of big jade traders and some had studied in eastern China or abroad. As I discussed in Chapter 3, some urbanites in Shanghai were by 2018 rediscovering and reconstructing a 'traditional' Chinese culture that some associated with Yunnan, while turning away from Western culture. Meanwhile, some of Ruili's youth in 2018 displayed an 'openness' that reminded me of Shanghai's cosmopolitan atmosphere in the mid-2000s. Youth

developed new subcultures. Some flashed new tattoo, hair, and clothing styles, and I met a local group of hip hop'ers, who busted EDM rap in Yunnan-dialect over homebrewed beats. They associated KTVs with their parents' generation. I also occasionally joined a group of teachers to do calligraphy and chat over red wine or tea in a private room of a teahouse-restaurant owned by a Cantonese woman. The room hosted bookshelfs with carved jade pieces. The jade set the atmosphere, but clients could also purchase pieces they liked. Meanwhile, some jade carvers were developing new styles and concepts. Policies, demand and technologies structured Ruili's feicui market and economy, but some people were stubbornly carving out their own directions.

Thirdly, *tea drinking* is a sociality closer to the 'quiet' beer drinking in folk bars than to the 'noisy' KTV, and nightclub sociality. Practically all jade shops and carving workshops in Ruili feature a tea table - usually in carved hardwood and with a tap and drain - which functions as their social heart. Receiving clients, business associates, or friends, you gather around the tea table for a chat. 'Pouring tea' (*pao cha*) is a craft, if not an art form as in the ritualised 'kung fu tea ceremony' (*gongfu cha*) from Fujian and Guangdong that one Fujianese jade carver performed for me. Big jade companies usually have staff skilled in pouring tea. Basic tea pouring involves 'washing' tea leaves with hot water in a pot, pouring the water into the drain, then adding new water, pouring the tea into a pitcher, and from there into 2-3 centiliter cups, adding fresh water to the leaves up to 10 times. While individual toasts in beers can perform hierarchies, interactions around tea tables are more informal, communal, and egalitarian. Zhang (2014: 167) notes how pouring tea from the pot into the serving pitcher from which teacups are filled "assured that every guest's cup of tea would be of the same strength and consistency, symbolising that each person around the tea table was equal". Like tapping the hand of someone lighting your cigarette, gratitude to the tea pourer is expressed by tapping your fingers twice on the tea table. Many locals drink Yunnanese Puer tea sold in compressed discs containing 357 grams, which was convenient for the long-distance trade along the Tea Horse Road that according to some Yunnanese tea experts allowed for the natural fermentation that gives this tea its characteristic taste (ibid: 10, 13-14, 95-96). But most companies hold numerous tea types, often including Longjing tea from Zhejiang and Oolong tea from Fujian, and like cigarettes brands, tea preferences can reflect local affiliations. Similar to my discussion of feicui in Chapter 7, Zhang highlights the singularity of tea and its diversification according to numerous parameters. These include species, level and process of fermentation, age, colour, drying, place of cultivation and processing, and

whether it grows on bushes or trees. Further, tastes are described with a battery of terms matching that used to describe perceptible properties of feicui.

A key distinction is between nonfermented 'raw tea' (*sheng cha*), often called 'green tea' (*lü cha*), and fermented 'cooked' tea (*shu cha*), or 'red' and 'dark tea' (*hong cha* and *hei cha*).[50] I interviewed tea traders in Ruili and Kunming. Several of them said 'raw tea' is most suited for younger people and 'cooked tea' is for older people. One tea trader described *raw tea* as 'benign' (*liangxing*), counteracting throat pains and coughing, cooling, fragrant, and energising, making you 'clear-headed' (*qingxing*), and fit for drinking in the morning. In turn, he described *cooked tea* as 'soft, warm, and fragant' (*wenxin*), 'smooth' (*shunhua*), soothing, calming, good for the stomach and weight loss, and fit for drinking at night before sleeping. Raw tea, associated with youth, thus works in the 'high' domain of the head and is considered stimulating, while 'cooked tea', associated with older people, works in the 'low' domain of the abdomen and is considered relaxing. With Reed's (2007: 36) discussion of how cigarettes 'vitally act upon' PNG prison inmates, we might consider the popularity of methamphetamines and ephedrine among youth on the one hand, and opium and heroin among older people on the other, in terms of binary principles of 'stimulation'//'calming' and 'high'//'low' that also manifest in states engendered by 'raw' versus 'cooked' tea. This is not to propose that materialities like tea and drugs *determine* concepts like high and low, but rather that they *actualise* them. The high//low binary also guides jade carving. Pendants of the Buddha *Fo* are often carved in transparent 'glass type' feicui with a patch of green colour in the stomach. A jade trader told me green means prosperity, and that the green patch in the stomach has the connotation of keeping wealth (*fu*) 'inside', while the head should be clear and light and thus without colour. A 27 year-old tea trader, who practiced kung fu and qigong, told me that in qigong you push your *qi* downwards from the head, so that "up is light, and low is heavy" (*shangsheng qingsong, xiasheng zhong*). Concepts like high and low can be seen here as mutually constituting forces that manifest both in material things, and human bodies and practices.

This tea trader moved to Ruili from eastern China's Zhejiang province to live a more quiet life, and like some eastern Chinese jade carvers was more rehearsed in Han Chinese high culture than many local Yunnanese. Like Cindy and Chloe in Shanghai

[50] Fermentation is a key parameter in distinguishing tea. It refers to oxidation reaction (from contact with the air) or microbial enzymatic reaction (from stacking in a moist environment). Different degrees of fermentation produce different flavours. There are six main types of Chinese tea, and degree of fermentation reflects in the resulting tea brew: green, yellow, white, blue-green, red, and dark tea (Zhang 2014: 11). Puer tea is considered dark tea.

he liked Western culture when he was younger, but now he feels Chinese culture is superior: "Native Americans came from China", he says, "and Europeans adopted Chinese inventions like pasta, ceramics, and paper. When Europeans were still eating with the hands, Chinese already used chopsticks". For him, elements of Chinese culture like tea, kung fu, and jade are intimately connected. Tea, kung fu, and jade needs *time* to mature, but their manifestations also depend on inherent potential (*qianli*). He sees kung fu as a self-cultivation that trains both body and mind, in opposition to Westerners who go to the gym to get big muscles. In kung fu, your movements and breathing build up energy, before you release it powerfully: "Don't think about hitting, just be light and relaxed, then you build up power. You should just make a small hit, but with great power. If you hit hard, you get tired. Just hit a little; like tea, just pour a little. We Chinese are not individualists like Westerners. We do not want to be number 1, to show off. If we are number 2 or 3, we can still improve. Like a cup of tea, you should not be too full". He seems here to value potentials and processes more so than their actualization as an end result.[51] He says you can also self-cultivate through tea drinking and jade carving: "For example, jade carvers put their thoughts and culture into the stone". This self-cultivation is simultaneously a cultivation and animation of jade.

I interview another tea trader, a 19-year old Burmese-Chinese woman from a village in Myanmar's Shan State. She makes an analogy between tea and people. "There is black and white, fat and skinny, tall and short. Tea trees with large trunks are not always the best ones. The most important is the root [*benshen*]. That's the same for people". Visible appearances or manifestations can deceive, while the hidden root is a core principle that seems congruent with the inherent potential of things noted by the Zhejiang tea trader. In her village in the Shan State, they grow both Puer tea and Oolong tea from Fujian. The latter was brought and cultivated by Fujianese KMT soldiers. Similarly, descendants of KMT troops in the northern Thai village of Mae Salong cultivate Oolong tea. Villagers there told me teams from Taiwan had brought them the tea bushes and taught them how to cultivate them. Like the Zhejiang tea trader, she does not like to drink alcohol, but prefers to drink tea and chat in her shop as a way of making friends.

[51] While the tea trader says he values a position below 'number 1', because it leaves space for improvement and contrasts Western individualist ambitions, the statement can also refer to a notion in traditional Chinese philosophy, originating from Daoism and Confucianism, that "the top position is dangerous because it is envied and easily attacked by others" (Zhang 2014: 117), which also makes sense in China's political climate both during, and after Mao.

While the informal sociality of chatting around tea drinking is similar to informal beer drinking in Ruili's folk bars, connotations of tea as a national symbol of 'traditional' Chinese culture are similar to those of jade. Like jade, tea is considered a highly singular and multifaceted material that requires personal engagement over time to get to know. Such engagement can be a form of self-cultivation that also positions you as 'having culture' (*you wenhua*), which is often equated with proficiency in Han Chinese high culture. Mastering the formal politeness of guanxi is a starting point for most interactions. But bringing elements often associated with guanxi, like alcohol and 'noise', into the quiet environments of teahouses and jade carving workshops is inappropriate.

## Guanxi and Friendship: Exteriority and Interiority

Initiating this chapter, I noted that some younger informants separate between guanxi and friendship as, respectively, means and ends of interactions. Below, I present Mr He's articulation of this tension. From Lincang, Mr He's mother is Han Chinese and his father is Tu, an ethnic group related to Mongolian groups. His father does tea business. He has family in the Kokang area of Myanmar's Shan State, some of who escaped to Yunnan, when fighting between the Tatmadaw and Peng Jiasheng's Kokang MNDAA army flared up in February 2015, which led 40-50.000 civilians to flee across the Chinese border. Mr He has an MBA from a university in Bangkok. He contrasts China's hectic and sometimes brutal business world, where he says people cheat, lie, and backstab, to what he feels is a more relaxed and spiritual life in Thailand. He says he has come to accept Western values and experiences conflicts of values in China.

Mr He used to work in a joint venture between a Chinese and a Dutch company doing quartz and silica business. Quartz and silica is found together, and the Dehong Prefecture holds rich deposits. With a hardness of 7 on Moh's scale, quartz ($SiO_2$) is harder than jade, and silica sand (quartz broken down into granules) has been used in jade carving tools for centuries. Jade carving drills used in China today are made of steel with silica sand. The Chinese company mined quartz and silica in Yunnan, processed it to silicon, and exported it to the Dutch company, which used it in products like batteries, solar panels, and shampoo. Mr He was chosen as vice-general-manager of the Chinese company because he could deal with both sides. He describes the different business cultures thus:

> Doing business is very different. Abroad, you have many meetings to negotiate, but once you sign the contract, you follow the contract. In China, you don't make a contract, you just agree by word, especially in small companies. You agree, but then they just don't pay or don't send the product. You must bribe people. In big companies, you may have to bribe the financial officer; otherwise he might delay the payment for a year. Then you will loose investment chances, because you don't have the money in hand. So you must make guanxi with the financial officer.

Mr He had been involved in another business, which highlighted risks in Chinese markets without contractual security. He was working in the island of Hainan, and his father wanted to open a tea saloon there, which would provide a private space for people to discuss business. Mr He's family invested 3 million *Yuan* in the business, of which Mr He personally invested 600.000 *Yuan*. They bought high-quality tea to sell in the shop and expensive jade, and wood sculptures that were used as interior decoration, but could also be purchased by clients. But Mr He had a conflict with his partner. This partner did not invest in the shop, but only paid the rent, which was less than 100.000 *Yuan* per year. After opening the shop, the partner insisted he should get 80 per cent of the profits. Unable to agree about the shares, they closed down the shop. Mr He had commissioned carvers to do the jade, and wood sculptures, and had to resell the leftover stock to the suppliers and carvers with a loss that he and his family covered. Mr He later invested in a bar in Hainan with a friend. They both bought a 10 per cent share of the bar, which earns him 2000 *Yuan* per month. If he needs money, he will sell his share. His friend sends him the financial records monthly, and he says the numbers are always correct. Mr He says he can trust this partner, because they were neighbours for several years. In Mr He's account, personal relationships and trust is thus crucial in reducing risks in business ventures.

Mr He moved to Ruili in 2013 to work as general manager in the Prosperous Jade Company, a position below company owner Mr Zhao and director Mr Huang, but above the rest of the staff. He says Zhao is very generous. With 56 feicui mining pits in the Kachin State, Zhao has plentiful supplies. But when Huang closed down the Many Gemstones Company in late 2013 due to waning demand for expensive feicui jewellery, Zhao let Huang sell his unsold stock in the Prosperous Jade Company. The deal was that once Huang had his investments covered, he would share profits from the remaining stock with Zhao. Also, Zhao lets Huang tell customers that he is the company owner to inspire trust. Zhao himself like to 'stay low', and Huang's outgoing personality, PR-skills as a journalist, and network as a government official

makes him an ideal 'face' of the company. "Zhao owns everything, and he has all the connections in Myanmar", Mr He says, "but Huang brings the customers. Whatever you need to say to customers, Huang will say it". Mr He describes his job as a learning experience: "I learn how to do business and how to deal with people".

Mr He must be available to the company 24 hours a day. For example, if clients from Beijing are in town and want to have a late night meal, go to a KTV, get a massage, or gamble at night, Huang calls Mr He to arrange it. Sometimes gambling sessions last all night, and Mr He cannot go home to sleep before the clients do. When we go to a banquet with clients, Mr He offers toasts and gives cigarettes to clients on behalf of Mr Huang. Mr Zhao is often in Myammar and rarely participates in such guanxi activities. Meanwhile, work and leisure seem inseparable domains in Mr Huang's life. Huang was rarely at the company. His job was to make and maintain guanxi and he was out for lunches and dinners daily with feicui buyers, carvers, journalists, jade trade association members, and government officials. Mr He separates between his friends and his associates in the feicui business world: "It is a principle for me to have friends outside my business", he says, "I need to separate work and free time. This is an influence from my time abroad".

Smaller feicui companies in Ruili are usually family businesses. Mr He says this can create problems: "In the West, Jewish people also do family business, but it is clear who has how many shares. In Chinese families it is not clear who has how many shares. If the business becomes big, it can become a problem. Then money can destroy families". In a study of moral discourses in a village in the Guangdong Province, Oxfeld (2010: Chapter 7) relates how for some informants 'money causes trouble'. Oxfeld found different meanings of money, depending on time, context, and how people spend it. While official corruption and conspicuous consumption was sometimes criticised within a Maoist discourse, money could be converted into moral spheres, and the most important was for people to *remember their moral debt* to their family and ancestors.[52] Mr Huang once took me to his father's tomb in a hillside forest outside Ruili with a workman he had contracted to renovate the burial site. The renovation can be seen in the context of such moral debt, which is not precisely specified in monetary value. But for Mr He, the lack of precise and contractual specification of monetary shares in family companies opens up for greed and conflicts.

[52] Contrary to Yunxiang Yan (2009, 2011) Oxfeld argues against claims that "the demise of Maoism with its clear-cut ideology coupled with China's incorporation into the world of capitalism has left a moral vacuum" (ibid: 45).

In his spare time, Mr He likes to go fishing or play basketball with his friends. All his close friends are outside the company. "If we do business together it is not a pure relationship", he says. He describes doing business and guanxi as acting a role, a formalised performance of prescribed relationships:

> In Chinese culture, you must learn how to be a social person. In business, you have to learn how to deal with relationships. You cannot be yourself. You must be an actor. In the job, I am an actor. This is the Chinese way. But outside the job, I am a very different person. I am totally open.
>
> Guanxi is about adjusting your behaviour; about how close or open you should be to people. I must evaluate people in a short time; is it an open person? Some customers rank people. I must see this very fast. If the customer is this kind of person, I must act very honourable, show respect. For example, when I serve tea to customers, I must pour the tea very gently. There's a correct and polite way of pouring tea. Your have to be formal in your body language. But Mr Zhao is very friendly. He does not rank people. I can be himself with him; I do not have to act. Mr Zhao is not comfortable with people, who are too polite. This is his nature. Some think that people who are too friendly are fools. But Mr Zhao is no fool. He knows everything, and he sees everything.

Mr He code-switched from our informal conversations to a formal, polite form of interacting with clients in the Prosperous Jade Company. He said he could be himself when talking to me, because his time abroad had exposed him to 'Western values', which to him equated a more informal sociality. Discussing how the self is continually created in interactions between actors, audiences, and stages, Goffman (1959) distinguished between 'frontstage' surroundings, where we assume roles expected by others, and 'backstage', where we can step out of the frontstage role. In the Chinese frontstage of guanxi, deference, hierarchy, politeness, formality, and rituality are expressed in ways of distributing particular cigarettes, of toasting in KTVs, and of pouring tea gently. Mr He contrasts the frontstage sociality of business and guanxi with fishing or playing basketball with his friends, which offers a backstage sociality, where he can be himself.

Mr He explained how people decipher, and act upon social status. For example, the father of his friend is a high-ranking official in the provincial government. Once, his friend's Mercedes was in the car repair shop and he got a Toyota as a lending car. "He was driving like he would in the Mercedes", Mr He said, "he took a turn where it

is not allowed". A policeman stopped him. But when he showed his father's business card, the policeman saluted him and let him drive on. In another case a young jingpo man, who worked at a KTV owned by Ruili's 'biggest boss' - let us call him Mr Xi – was driving home at night on his motorbike, when police stopped him and asked for money. When the young man showed the policemen his lighter with Mr Xi's company name and logo, they let him go.

Economic wealth often translates as political power and guanxi, and vice versa. Everybody in Ruili knows Mr Xi's name and company. Mr Xi is ethnic jingpo and did cross-border trade early on. Some say he started out smuggling heroin. He eventually built a business empire that spans jade trade, real estate, hotels and KTVs, a cigarette factory, a silica factory, a spa resort, a private hospital, a bank, and an airline company. In 2019, Mr Xi was expanding his business to Cambodia, where was opening a branch of his bank and a casino. Some locals say he owns 25 per cent of real estate in Ruili. Mr Xi lives in a huge gated compound in southern Ruili. A friend, who had been inside, says Mr Xi has 100 staff in the compound, alongside a vast car park that includes a Rolls Royce. He also has a private heliport for his helicopter outside Ruili. Mr Xi is popular among locals, because he hires local ethnic youth for his factories, hotels, and KTVs, and a taxi driver referred to him as 'big father' (*lao da*). In 2013, rumours said an official had been sent down from Beijing to 'take down' Mr Xi as part of the anti-corruption campaign. In 2014 rumours spread on WeChat that Mr Xi had been arrested, and local jingpo youth were angry. But two weeks later, media reports with pictures of a smiling Mr Xi announced the opening of his airline company. A friend said it had been impossible to take down Mr Xi for corruption, because it would involve taking down most of the local and prefectural governments in Ruili and Mangshi, who were economically involved in his businesses. Mr Xi was simply too powerful and well connected to take down.

## Forms of Sociality

This chapter has discussed how social relationships matter in the feicui trade. I have pointed to a continuum of relationships, with hierarchy, formality, and instrumentalism on the one end, and commonality, informality, and friendship on the other. Based on culturalist and institutionalist approaches, I have discussed how gifts of feicui can be a currency in instrumental guanxi relations, while guanxi also sustains the feicui trade by creating trust and reciprocities in non-contractual markets.

I have further discussed how guanxi is entangled with an economy of prestige, where women can contribute to the masculine 'face' of Chinese businessmen, while cigarettes, alcohol, and tea mediate interactions, exchanges, and consumption that configure social relations along vertical and horizontal lines. On the one hand, interactions, exchanges, and consumption can expose differential deference and social positions, and thus contribute to masculine 'face' as a socially hierarchizing principle. On the other hand, they can also maintain more egalitarian notions of commonality and friendship. Some younger informants contrast the hierarchy, formality, and instrumentalism of guanxi to more informal interaction forms and sincere 'interior' sentiments of friendship. Guanxi, as Mr He says, can feel like acting a role, where 'exterior' interaction form and 'interior' sentiments feel incongruent.

Still, politeness and etiquette performed in guanxi relations extend beyond the business world and can be broadly considered part of the 'game' of social life in China that also leaves room for play. Simmel (1949) pointed to a 'pure' sociability (*geselligkeit*) as a highly stylised form of egalitarian sociality among autonomous individuals in modern social venues. While I maintain that we cannot assume a Chinese personhood identical to that of autonomous individuals in 20th century Western modernity nor a mutually exclusive separation between instrumental and non-instrumental social exchange in China, Simmel's emphasis on *form* and *play* allows us to consider play, enjoyment, and commonality in ritualised social forms. The purpose of going to banquets or KTVs is not only to make functional guanxi, but also to enjoy a social situation together, and social forms and etiquette that formally express hierarchy can also allow for playful commentaries that 'nip' at this hierarchy. For example, playfully or ironically addressing a friend in a higher social position than yourself as 'big brother' (*da ge*) or 'boss' (*laoban*) in a toast can also be a commentary that in this context of drinking together you are equals. Politeness, formality, and etiquette can, like ritual, constitute a 'shadow form' that hosts a polysemic space for commentaries on social hierarchy without changing the mood of the situation or the structure of this hierarchy.

# 6. Fissure: Interethnic and Intraethnic Conflicts

Subjected to pressure or collision with another material, feicui can fracture along cleavage planes that are inherent in the material, but may be invisible to the naked eye (Schumann 1976: 24). We may propose a similar principle for the social texture of ethnic and interethnic communities, in which cleavage planes can manifest as fissures due to different types of pressure. Whereas the previous chapter discussed guanxi as a largely integrative social form within Ruili's Han Chinese jade trade community, this chapter focuses on interethnic and intraethnic relations, describing both alliances and conflicts with integrative and fracturing effects on social texture. Presenting narratives of a Rohingya jade trader in Ruili, the chapter addresses two broad questions about ethnicity in the jade trade.

First, how can we understand ethnic identifications, conflicts, and alliances in the Myanmar-China borderlands, where multiple ethnic groups interact around jade? Different ethnic groups have engaged in the cross-border trade of jade between the mines in Kachin State and neighbouring areas, including northern Thailand and China's Yunnan Province (Chang 2004, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2014; Hlaing 2007; Frey and Lintner 1991; Hughes 1999; Hughes *et. al.* 2000). I likewise found the contemporary jade trade to retain a multi-ethnic character. While the jade trade stimulates business alliances and networks across ethnic groups, interethnic conflicts in Myanmar may follow people into China. Furthermore, vast economic profits in the jade trade can stimulate conflicts that may dissolve ethnic loyalties. We therefore need to position jade traders also within their own ethnic group, which involves considering intraethnic conflicts.

Secondly, how can we theorize roles of nonhumans in human ethnic identifications? Symbolic and hermeneutical approaches, influential from the 1980s, have posited nonhumans as passive generic sources for human constructions of meanings, values, and identities. Meanwhile, the past decade has seen attempts at rethinking the relationship between the human and nonhuman, culture and nature as

inseparable. In line with Lévi-Strauss (1962), I acknowledge a generic efficacy of the nonhuman in representing ethnic distinctions to humans, but further focus on how this efficacy is afforded by inherent characteristics of particular nonhuman agents. Discussing how fighting cocks and dogs are ascribed with ethnicity, I argue that nonhumans can function as 'indexes' through which humans 'abduct' agency, intensions and subjectivity of other ethnic humans (see Gell 1998).

The chapter discusses narratives related by Hamid, a Sunni-Muslim Rohingya man from the Arakan State of Southwest Myanmar, who worked as a jade trader in Ruili during my first fieldworks there.[53] Hamid's narratives of ethnic identification, conflicts, and jade trade alliances highlight connectivity in the Myanmar-Yunnan borderland region, and risks and opportunities of border crossings. The chapter further discusses how Hamid conceptualises his relation to a 'predatory' ethnic other in terms of an analogous relation between animal prey and predator. Finally, the chapter considers inconsistencies in Hamid's narrative as reflecting his concern with projecting an image of Rohingya people as victims in an unequal interethnic conflict with Burmese Buddhists, while downplaying Rohingya actions that he considers embarrassing, including intraethnic conflicts.

## A Rohingya Jade Trader in Ruili

The first time I meet Hamid in Ruili's *Zhubaojie* jade bazaar, he leads me to the privacy of a jade shop, and tells me about persecutions that his Rohingya people experience in Myanmar's Arakan state. Hamid browses through images of Bollywood actresses on his cell phone until a picture of a decapitated Rohingya man pops up on the screen. The next image is of the charred bodies of three Rohingya children. Hamid's friend says the pictures are from his village. "This is what we fleeing from", Hamid says.

Following violent fights with Buddhist ethnic Rakhine peers Hamid fled his native village in the Buthidaung Township of the Arakan State at the age of 19. Acquiring a Bachelor degree in Bangladesh, he worked for his uncle, who imported Burmese teak and mahogany logs to the Bangladeshi city of Cox Bazaar. After discovering that his uncle also smuggled in 'No. 4' (a regional slang for heroin) from Myanmar, Hamid

[53] The Arakan State was officially re-named Rakhine in 1989. Reflecting my informants' voices, I write Arakan State, while the term Rakhine here refers to a predominantly Buddhist ethnic group in Arakan State.

left to Saudi Arabia, where he worked in the store of a relative for almost ten years. In 2009, he travelled to Ruili, where a number of Rohingya have found refuge. My Rohingya informants' estimates of their population size in Ruili and Jiegao varied from 5.000 to 15.000.

In Ruili, Hamid started working with another uncle, who buys jade stones from ethnic Kachin suppliers in northern Myanmar. These stones are exempted from the tax issued by the Myanmar government and, smuggled to China, also from the import tax officially levied at the border gate in Jiegao. Rohingya traders can thus sell such stones to Chinese buyers cheaper than taxed stones. Hamid also operates as a broker for other Rohingya traders. Finding buyers for these traders' jade stones, Hamid acquires 5-10 per cent of their sales price. The confrontational politics of ethnicity in Myanmar stimulates population displacement and shifting interethnic alliances extending beyond Myanmar's national borders. In this context, Hamid has employed his mobility, networks, and skills to position him as what Egreteau (2013) calls a 'border area broker' in the profitable trade of Burmese jade in China. Cross-border jade traders in the multi-ethnic Myanmar-Yunnan borderland often need to build alliances with different ethnic and military groups. Hlaing (2007) discusses how the Shan/Dai have always been 'in-between' the lowland and highland peoples. In the lowlands, they were seen as minority peoples, while the highland people saw them as representing the Buddhist lowland civilizations. This 'in-betweenness' placed them in a unique situation to serve as cultural brokers in the jade trade. Many Rohingya similarly seem to have carved out a niche as brokers between Chinese jade buyers and suppliers in Myanmar. According to Hamid, some Rohingya jade traders in Ruili have married Christian Kachin women and Buddhist Shan women, who then convert to Islam. Such interethnic marriages seem to consolidate jade trade alliances.

Yet, outside jade markets and cockfighting arenas, I rarely witnessed Rohingya socialize with other ethnic groups in Ruili. Calling Rohingya 'black people' (*heiren*), a Han Chinese jade trader characterised their eating with their hands and wearing slippers and *longyi* as a 'lack of culture' (*meiyou wenhua*). He saw China's superior economic development manifested in the currency exchange rate: "When I go to Mandalay to buy jade, I have to carry big bags of cash", he laughed. China imports a range of natural resources from northern Myanmar, and exports processed goods. The Chinese jade trader exclaimed: "We Chinese are smart. We receive all the valuable things from Myanmar, and sell them the things, we don't need; motorbikes, clothes, telephones". One Rohingya jade trader likewise remarked: "Our valuable things in Myanmar go to China. Chinese want to produce electricity in Myanmar for Chinese

people, but in Myanmar we are like Aladdin – we have to use oil lamps". With Pratt (1991: 35), we may considier such a statements as a 'revisionist account' of the official Chinese narrative of China-Myanmar bilateral economic exchanges as mutually beneficial. Some local Yunnanese called Rohingya *kala*, a term that originally referred to Muslims of South Asian origin in Myanmar (Chang 2014: 97), and carried negative racial associations that intensified with rising Bamar nationalism after Burma's independence (Jones 2017). Chang's Yunnanese Muslim Hui informants in Myanmar's Shan State said they very rarely intermarry with *kala*, whom one informant described as "religiously more conservative and fundamental and secularly more cunning, quarrelsome, and untrustworthy" (Chang 2014: 124). While I found most Han Chinese to have somewhat derogative attitudes towards Rohingya, many Rohingya were grateful for being allowed to stay in China. "The Chinese government just wants peace and to do business", one Rohingya man said, "they tell us 'no rape, no fighting, no drugs, then you can stay here'". Hamid presents himself as a 'good Muslim', and says his *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca gives him authority in Ruili's Rohingya community. Ruili hosts one mosque, which mostly accommodates Rohingya, but also some Hui, Uyghurs and Pakistani gem traders.

Deprived of the right to citizenship documentation and subjected to discriminatory policies and persecutions in Myanmar, Rohingya has been described by the UN as one of the world's most persecuted minorities. Military purges after Burma's independence have resulted in surges of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh and across the Indian Ocean to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia on rackety boats. The Thai army has reportedly towed the boats out to open sea, and many Rohingya have died during these emigration attempts, while mass graves with Rohingya bodies have been uncovered in human trafficking camps in Thailand and Malaysia.[54] In 1978, around 200.000 Muslims from Arakan State fled to Bangladesh following an operation against 'illegal immigrants', and in the early 1990s an estimated 250.000 Rohingya took refuge in Bangladesh after a military crackdown.[55] After three Rohingya men reportedly raped a Buddhist Rakhine woman on May 28, 2012, violent clashes between Rakhine and Rohingya ensued, and around 400.000 Rohingya had fled to Bangladesh per 2015. New violence ensued after Rohingya insurgents attacked more than 30 police posts in northern Arakan State on August 25, 2017. By September 22, 2017, security analysts estimated 30.000 to 35.000 Myanmar army troops to be on the ground in Arakan State, and by 24 October, the

[54] *Human Rights Watch*, 1 May 2015.
[55] *Asia Times*, 22 September 2017.

number of refugees to Bangladesh had reached 604.000.[56] Leader of Myanmar's government, Aung San Suu Kyi, has denied allegations of ethnic cleansing. She by and large avoided addressing the Rohingya issue during her election campaign, and the official term proposed by Suu Kyi's government is now "people who believe in Islam in Rakhine State".[57]

While media often posit the conflicts in Arakan State as ethnic-religious, some observers link the government's stake in killings and forceful displacements of Rohingya to land-grabbing strategies.[58] As part of its Belt and Road Initiative, China has invested in a port, a Special Economic Zone and industrial, and pipeline projects at Kyaukphyu on the Bay of Bengal in Arakan State. A Buddhist Rakhine political activist I interviewed noted that the violence in 2012 erupted as the oil and gas pipeline from the Arakan coastline to China was to be completed. He said China had demanded of Myanmar to finish its part of the pipeline in time, and that Burmese political leaders faked a rape of a Buddhist schoolgirl by Muslim men to ignite ethnic violence that would divert attention from local protests against the pipeline. The Chinese ambassador to Myanmar reportedly "strongly welcomed" clearance operations of the Burmese army, arguing that stabilizing the region benefits the security of Chinese investments.[59] Aung Soe Lin notes how such 'stabilization' means "displacing and dispossessing Rohingya people who are seen as potential threats to the orderly accumulation of capital, most recently through their association with Islamic extremism. Newly open land, expropriated people killed off or herded into camps, and sustained discussions over repopulating northern Rakhine with specifically non-Muslim people - these are the basic dynamics of primitive accumulation and settler colonialism".[60]

By June 2013, sectarian violence between Buddhists and Muslims had spread up to the northern Shan State, and Ruili's Rohingya community closely followed news via smartphones. One day, Hamid agitatedly told me that Buddhists armed with long knives had gathered by the Myanmar border in Muse, just five kilometres from Ruili, and that around 40 Buddhists planning an attack on the Rohingya had been

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[56] *Asia Times*, 22 September 2017, *Inter Sector Coordination Group*, 24 October 2017.

[57] *The Asean Economist*, 21 June 2016. Suu Kui's spokesman, U Kyaw Zay Ya, said the government "will not call the Rohingya people by that name because it does not recognize them as citizens" (*New York Times*, 6 May 2016).

[58] See, for example, Saskia Sassen (*The Guardian*, January 4, 2017), Lee Jones (*New Mandala* 26/9, 2017) and Aung Soe Lin (*Focaalblog* September 28 2017) for discussions about contemporary land-grabbing strategies versus historical factors, including British colonialism, in recent displacements of Rohingya from Arakan State.

[59] Aung Soe Lin in *Focaalblog,* September 28, 2017.

[60] Aung Soe Lin in *Focaalblog,* September 28, 2017.

apprehended by Chinese police in Ruili, and sent back across the border. Hamid said: "I don't know why they hate us so much. We are peaceful people. We just do business here. But if they come here to fight, we will fight".

Hamid became my gatekeeper to Ruili's Rohingya community. Wen-Chin Chang (2014) employs a 'personal narrative approach' in stitching together stories of cross-border mobility, caravan trade, military conflicts, transnational Islamic identity, and gendered experiences among Yunnanese in Burma's Shan State into an account of life in a borderland region. Chang presents informants' stories through transcripts of narratives, noting how narration reveals fragments of realities, or distortions of realities (ibid: 10). Presenting Hamid's narratives below, this chapter does not comprise a comprehensive study of ethnic identity among Rohingya in Ruili, and Hamid's narratives outline a largely masculinised world. But with inspiration from Chang's personal narrative approach, I seek to show how Hamid experiences conflicts and alliances, mobility, jade trade, and cockfighting as underpinned by ethnicity. Hamid's narratives are extracted from ten recorded interviews, five video recordings, and informal conversations in 2013, as well as messages on WeChat and Facebook from 2013 to 2016.

Loïc Wacquant's (1998) account of the masculine economic life of a 'hustler' in Chicago is presented through narratives of a single informant, 'Rickey'. In line with Wacquant's representation, I prioritise literal interview transcripts over paraphrasing to give the reader a sense of Hamid's vernacular style and cultural personality. In Wacquant's account, the meeting with a cultural other in the in-depth interview allows Rickey "a rare opportunity to pause and look at himself from the outside" (ibid: 5). I contend that a similar process occurred during my interviews with Hamid, who was eager to tell an outside world about the predicament of his Rohingya people, but also about his own social position and identity.

## Ethnic Identity and Conflicts

While the dominant Rohingya narrative of their ethno-genesis legitimizes their habitation in Myanmar's Arakan State, the version of their Buddhist adversaries delegitimizes it. Mirroring official attitudes in Myanmar, a Buddhist Rakhine I interviewed rejected the existence of an ethnicity called Rohingya, and said they are Bengali people, who have recently migrated to the Arakan State from Bangladesh. In turn, Rohingya people in Ruili say they descend from Arab traders and have been in

Arakan State for hundreds of years, mostly peacefully co-habiting with, and intermarrying their Rakhine neighbours. Hamid explained:

> Before, brother, Muslim traders from Arab country come with big boats to our Arakan State. A big boat come for trade. The Buddhists were waiting, the Arabs say "help us, help us".
>
> I: The boat went down, and then some local people helped them?
>
> Yeah, they invite them. The Rakhine King allowed them to settle there. Arab is handsome man. The girls of Rakhine Buddhists are beautiful, very tall. So they married each other. Many generations now. In the King's time, the Muslim fight together with the Buddhists. That time they live together like brothers.

Hamid contrasts this past Buddhist welcoming of Muslims and their peaceful coexistence in Arakan State with present violence and suppression, which makes many Rohingya flee:

> The Myanmar government gives them [the Rakhine] power. We are scared for our village, our relatives. For our Rohingya it's like a jail in our country. They cannot go another country, another province, another village. Some go to Bangladesh. Some go to Malaysia and Thailand from Bangladesh, but the boats are very old. They are 100 or 200 people in the boat. They [the coastguards] catch them, take money from them, and send them to the ocean. They die on the ocean.

Hamid reflects that to change the Rohingya's predicament demands violence. Though allegedly allied with international Islamic militant groups, Rohingya militias do not hold military power comparable to armies of groups like Kachin, Shan, and Wa in Myanmar. An option might be to join forces with other ethnic insurgent armies. But Hamid says most Rohingya are scared to go to war:

> I told him: "To get independent, you have to give blood. You have to go to war with government". Also Bangladesh, they had to. We are Rohingya, why we cannot get independence? I want to tell all Rohingya: "I am not Rohingya, I am Bengali. Because our people are not brave" [enough to go to war]. I tell to him. He is also Muslim, but not real Muslim. He is 3rd generation of Burmese Buddhist. Fake Muslim.
>
> I: Does he attend the Mosque?

Yes. I think his mother is Muslim.

I: You think some Rohingya will join the Kachin [in their war]?

Yeah. Kachin told us "welcome Rohingyas, come join us, then we start fighting Burmese government". Some Rohingya go there and fight with Kachin. I saw when I go from Yinjiang [in China] to Myitkina [in Myanmar's Kachin State]. I saw Rohingya. Where the bridge is [at Laiza, on the Yunnan-Kachin border]. There were some people with beards. Muslims. There were also KIA [Kachin Independence Army] people.

Generally presupposing Islamic faith, Hamid here suggests that Rohingya ethnicity depends on both ancestry and actions. He labels a 3rd generation descendant of a Buddhist a 'fake' Muslim, even though his mother is Muslim and he attends the mosque, indicating that being a 'genuine' Muslim depends on ancestry. But he also suggests that Rohingya ethnicity depends on actions, notwithstanding ancestry. He argues that people only qualify as Rohingya insofar as they are brave enough to go to war, whereas those who are not should take upon themselves the label of Bengali, which effectively characterises them as outsiders in Myanmar.

While Kachin and Rohingya people have a common enemy in the Tatmadaw, both KIA and Rohingya spokesmen have denied a military alliance, as suggested by Hamid.[61] A KIA official told me about the Federal Union Army (FUA), set up by several ethnic insurgent armies for a joint war effort against the Tatmadaw. He said it would be impossible to include Rohingya, because the FUA features a Rakhine army. Another Kachin informant told me that the KIA has kicked out people from Kachin State, whom they characterised as 'radical Muslims' linked to Al Qaeda.[62]

Hamid said that organising remittances is risky, because informers have infiltrated Ruili's Rohingya community:

[61] KIA senior officer James Lum Daum told the *Irrawaddy* newspaper that "There are no Rohingya in the KIA area […] But there are several Arakanese [Rakhine] in Kachin". Likewise, Maung Kyaw Nu of the Burmese Rohingya Association of Thailand in 2014 said that there was no cooperation between armed Rohingya and the KIA (*Irrawaddy*, September 9, 2014).

[62] Bertil Lintner has also pointed to an Al Qaeda connection and reported on military training camps for Rohingya on the Bangladeshi side of the border. According to intelligence analysts, the mentor of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) is Abdus Qadoos Burmi, a Pakistani of Rohingya descent, who has called for 'jihad' in Myanmar (Lintner n.d.; *Asia Times* September 25, 2017; September 20, 2017).

> Here, some people hate me, because I tell the truth. They have money, but they are not educated. So I tell the truth: “Brother, why you not give [alms]? You have money”. Then another informer, he is also our Muslim, he informs directly to [the Burmese] government, and government calls to Muse. Muse government informs the Chinese government. Says “they are sending money to Arakan for war”. But it's just for eating. They don't have homes, they don't have rice. Children are dead, some are ill, so we send money for eating, for medicine. The government suddenly tells us to stop sending money.

Hamid’s narratives circulate around discrimination, persecution, and violence in the Arakan State. In the interview transcript below, Hamid’s vivid account of violent incidents that induced him to flee his hometown to Bangladesh is interweaved with his self-presentation as a peaceful man, who nonetheless will fiercely fight injustices.

> My friends tell me there is a problem in the shop. Buddhist students come to drink. They ask [the Rohingya shop owner] for money and cigarettes. They didn't pay. So he tells them "Why you don't pay for your goods?” Then they beat him a lot. He was bleeding. So we fight. They are four people. We are two. After the fight they are very hurt.
>
> After 14 days, my friend tells our story to Rakhine. The Buddhists are also his friends. We are same high school. He betrayed me, cause I fell in love with a girl he also loves. We use masks when we fight. But he tells them who we are. Buddhists from another high school are after me. 17 students. They have knives and sticks. My school headmaster told my friends: “Call Hamid, I want to ask him about the fight”. The Buddhists are waiting for me there. They tell my headmaster "your student beat our friends. We will kill him". Our headmaster is Buddhist. Headmaster told me “you can't fight here. You can fight outside of the school area”. They said “if we will find you anywhere anytime we will kill you”. They know karate. But they are different man from me. I tell them: “If you want to fight, come alone, not many men”. Then my headmaster beat me with stick. He tells me “don't speak like that”.
>
> After one month, they come to our town, people who know kung fu and karate. We are outside a movie hall, and the Rakhine found me there. They bring sticks, knives. They are seven people. They beat me a lot. One woman there tells them "why are you beating him? You are seven people, he is one. I was bleeding. So the woman takes me into her home. She is Buddhist. She grew up with my father. Then I go home, and my

mother said, "I will tell your father". My father is boxer. He beat me. I am very afraid, but I am very angry. So I take a long knife. It's our culture. If someone hurt you, you take a long knife and go to coconut tree, mango tree, and you cut in the tree. When you go outside, every time you see [the cut], you never forget.

After two weeks, they come again to our town. Four people. They go into alcohol shop. After 10 o' clock [pm] if you are outside in the street, police will arrest you. Only our Muslims. They come out of alcohol shop, almost 11 o' clock. I follow them. Between block 4 and 5, I start fight. If you see how I can fight with four people! They are also strong. I attack them like evil attacker; I fight with flying kick, back kick. They have big umbrella. It's raining. They beat me with umbrella. I defend with my hand, and I block and kick and rounded kick. These people are very hard. But finally I beat them, and I kick them a lot in the face.

Brother, we are honest people. I always tell my friends "no fight". I am always good. Also my friend, we take water from the well. We always do work. We help the old men. But chairman of the block is very powerful. Also Buddhist. He has 9 sons. The youngest son fought with me. So they come to my father's shop. My father is also a chairman. He says to my father "if we find [Hamid], we will kill him". My father beat me with stick. He tells me "why you fight? My name will be bad. I am chairman". I tell him, "I don't want to live here. I am very afraid and sad to live in Arakan. I want to go to another country. If I live here, the Rakhine kill me". My father tells me: "You are a bad boy, you are not my son".

They start fighting. I don't accept fighting, but every day the Buddhists abuse our Muslims. After go to toilet, they throw those bad things [faeces] on our mosque and our homes. So I tell them: "We are humans, we are not animals!" We never throw those bad things at their temple. The Muslims are rich in town. So they are jealous of Muslims. Muslims do business. We have connections to Bangladesh, to Muslim countries. But the Rakhine don't have connections.

While Hamid suggests that Rakhine are jealous of the business prowess and networks of Muslims, the conflicts seem underpinned by ingrained ethnic-religious hostilities, and a curfew only applying to Muslims points to a politically sanctioned discrimination. Hamid sees in Buddhists throwing human faeces at Muslim houses and mosque an intention of dehumanising Rohingya. Beating up four guys alone, Hamid sees himself as 'a different man' than the Rakhine, who gang up and carry

weapons. He ascribes his fighting skills to his martial arts training and to his father's feeding him tiger blood, when he was three years old, which had created a sort of totemic relation between Hamid and the tiger: "That's why I sometimes feel very angry. I have hot temper, and I am very strong. I can break three bricks with my hands", he told me. Hamid's father reacts with disappointment and violence, as Hamid's fights affect his reputation as residential neighbourhood chairman. The narrative does contain examples of friendly Buddhist-Muslim relations, exemplified by the Buddhist woman who saves Hamid in the second fight. But the powerful characters of the school headmaster and the residential neighbourhood chairman, both Buddhists, structure events unfavourably to Hamid, who eventually considers emigration his only viable option.

## Borders and Mobility

Like most Rohingya men, Hamid took up jade trade upon arriving in Ruili. Mobility in the Yunnan-Myanmar borderlands is unequally distributed among jade traders of different ethnicity and nationality, and restricted by borders. But crossing the borders can be profitable.

National borders may contribute in configuring what Appadurai (1990) discusses as 'scapes', through which imagined worlds are constituted. Configuring conditions of entry and exit for nation-states, national borders may 'filter' and 'channel' goods, people, and imaginations, as my discussion in Chapter 3 of how 'Burmese' aspects of feicui biographies are often erased or downplayed in China demonstrates. But as van Schendel and de Maaker (2014: 4) note: "Borders have the capacity to block flows of people, ideas and goods but do so only selectively. All borders are permeable in various ways". The boundary lines between nation states, argues Baud and van Schendel (1996: 226), "symbolizes the effort of each state to maintain exclusive control of its half of the borderland, and in this respect the border is the ultimate symbol of its sovereignty. But this does not imply that the effort is ever wholly successful". By controlling flows at designated nodes, national borders precondition alternative routes allowing passage for that which is 'filtered out' at the officially sanctioned border gates. Locals from Dehong can acquire a border passport (*bianjingzhen*) allowing them to cross the border to Myanmar. But life in Ruili and travel to Myanmar hosts uncertainties for most Rohingya. The only formalization of their residency in China is a green-colour border-pass to be renewed annually in Ruili

and stamped weekly in Muse. That procedure can be risky, since most Rohingya hold neither Burmese nor Chinese passports, and if they are caught outside the site of their household registration in Myanmar, they may be arrested and deported back home. Hamid often goes to Muse for jade business:

> I go through the hole [a hole cut into the border fence] to Muse. If Chinese guards catch you, you must pay 500 Yuan.
>
> I: Why don't you go through the gate?
>
> It's very dangerous. One time, immigration officer takes my passport and asks me "who made this passport for you?" [temporary Burmese passport]. I tell him that I lost my ID card. He said "you must take ID card here, or we will arrest you". I tell him "I lost that card, now I have temporary card". He asks me "which police station gives you this card?" I tell him that my relative gave me this card, that my relative is in Mandalay. So I make up name of a police station in Mandalay. He tells me "you look like foreigner, are you from Arakan?" If I tell him that I am from Arakan, he will arrest me. So I tell him "We are from mountainside, not town area, of Yangon". I told him some place name.
>
> He takes my passport. He says it's not real. He wants money from me. I tell him: "I have temporary card [Chinese temporary residence permit] I will take for you". He tells me: "I don't trust you". So I tell him, "you can take my telephone, I will come back with my card". He takes my passport and my phone. He tells me to come back with my temporary card, but I don't come back. So later I go through hole [in border fence].

In May 2016, Hamid said that only Rohingya with a registered shop in Ruili could now apply for the temporary residence permit. The bribe to Chinese border guards was now a steep 5.000 *Yuan*. But other border crossings are more dangerous. Below, Hamid recounts a trip to Kachin State with his uncle, where they bought jade from Kachin suppliers. They crossed the Yunnan-Kachin border close to Laiza:

> They are fighting in Laiza now. On one side, Burmese shoot and take money from people. The Kachin are not taking money. I really like Kachin people. Some of them

are also Muslims, from India, from Tibet.[63] The bridge is broken. They carry iron rope, like a bridge. On another side is Burmese checkpoint. In Hpakant and Myitkina if you go out at night, you don't go to teashop. If [the Burmese army] find you there, they directly shoot you. They already told me "if you go for jade trade, no problem". But if you go through Kachin camp, if [Burmese army] find you, directly shoot. A lot of government informers there.

I was very afraid. I told my uncle: "I am very confused about the people here". After 5 o' clock, you cannot go to another side, so we must stay there on the Burmese side. They are maybe 35 people near alcohol shop. My uncle said "don't be afraid, I speak with them". My uncle tells the teashop owner "you buy them beer, I pay". So they drink. I am very scared, cause they do not like Muslims. When we sleep, maybe they shoot us. We get a room. I don't sleep, cause I am afraid. In the morning we go. You can rent motorcycles there, go to Myitkina. Road is mountainside. There are Kachin army on the road. Guarding the land. We leave 6 o' clock in the morning, and we arrive 7 hours later with motorbike [to Myitkina].

Rather than a static cultural identity, Barth (1969) pointed to ethnicity as a social process of boundary making and maintenance. While national borders accentuate nationality, sub-national military and police checkpoints in multi-ethnic borderlands are often places of ethnic boundary making. Hamid and his uncle eventually made it to the jade mines at Hpakant. There are several Burmese military checkpoints between Myitkina and Hpakant. Hamid's uncle had connections and could pay his way through, but they were questioned at one checkpoint. Hamid said they were allowed to pass by pretending to be Pakistani jade traders and that the military could have shot them if they knew they were Rohingya. Ethnic stigmatisation here made 'nominal change' of ethnicity feasible. Likewise, Hamid said Wa people are so associated with drug trade that they call themselves Shan in Ruili, while Chang (2011: 466) notes how before 1980, Yunnanese jade traders had to "disguise themselves as Kachin or Shan" to obtain permission to enter the jade mining areas. An important skill for cross-border jade traders in the region is the ability to classify

[63] Kachin people are predominantly Christian and animist. North India and Tibet have Muslim populations and some Kachin may have married Muslims, but the Kachin is not generally held to have migrated from Muslim-dominated cultural zones. Rev. O' Hanson (1917: 18) wrote that the origin of Kachin tribes is thought to be located in the highlands of Mongolia and the borderlands of Eastern Tibet and Sichuan. In Myitkina, two KIA officials offered a myth of migration to Guoguo and me, which placed the ethno-genesis of the Kachin on the banks of the Yellow River in Northeast China. Guoguo saw in the myth a Sinicisation of Kachin culture.

people. But in the Yunnan-Kachin borderland, Hamid says he is "very confused about the people", which makes it difficult to know their intentions.

## Interethnic Alliances

In 2014, Hamid was in Kunming, trying to sell jade stones. We kept contact via WeChat:

> I have nine jades. One I sell for only 9000 Yuan. So 8 stones remaining. Also in Ruili arrived 15 new stones from Hpakant. My friend will send to me. So I will receive and sell. This one is not sell yet, cause this one expensive. I told my customer 50.000, but they only want to give 16.000, so I don't want to sell it. Price is double from Ruili to Kunming. Also in Shanghai, Macao, Hong Kong. Cause Ruili is bordertown. So in Ruili and inside of China very different price.

Hamid's message illustrates how mobility can translate into economic profit for jade traders. The value of jade stones can multiply as they are transported from Kachin State across the border to Ruili. Hamid says that prices can be further doubled when the stones are transported from Ruili to Kunming, and the further east in China jade is moved, the higher price it generally acquires. This transportation is risky for Hamid, whose temporary Chinese border pass restricts him to stay inside Ruili. There is a police checkpoint outside Ruili on the road to Mangshi, and another one after Mangshi, which marks the border of the Dehong prefecture. This risky, but relatively straightforward way of conducting jade trade reminds us how many people make their living from moving material goods from one place to another, often crossing local, regional, and national borders, a practice that Mathews (2011) aptly calls 'suitcase capitalism'. In the spring of 2015, Hamid was on a similar trading mission, this time to the Wa State. He spent five months in the Wa State capital of Phang Kham (Panghsan) on the Burmese side of the border. We again communicated via WeChat:

> I am still in the Wa State. Someone betrayed me. He bought 28 pieces of jade from me, but he did not pay me yet. I discuss this with chairman from Wa State [general from United Wa State Army, UWSA]. Maybe he will settle our problem. I don't know before about the jade buyer. He was mafia. He lied. He wants to buy my jades. I sell with my broker. He [Hamid's broker] is also Rohingya. He sells all my jades. Then

> [the buyer] told me "I want to show my jade to my boss, so I want to carry your jade". I allow that. After he closes his phone so I cannot contact him. After one month, I meet with him, and he says: "I have a lot of loss of my jade in my business, so I could not contact with you". Wa State Chairman told me "no problem, I will decide, I will take money from him".
>
> [A week later] Chairman of Wa State told me that the man, who cheated me, is Kokang people, not Wa people. Chairman told me I must wait one month, because the buyer has not money yet. So we make agreement, he will pay my money after one month, so I wait for money. Then I will buy jade from Ruili and Yingjiang, and then I will come back.
>
> [A month later] Now I am back in Ruili. I am waiting for my contact in the Wa State. He is the second president [of the UWSA]. He wants to buy one million Yuan jade. I don't have, so I ask my friend to bring for him. They will come next week. [Hamid sends me a picture of a jade stone]. This stone is one million Yuan. If they buy, I get broker price. The buyers want to buy most precious jade [the UWSA general is a broker for those buyers]. They come from Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing. They are very big money. This is not my stone. The owner of the stone is Burmese people.

This trading venture underlined the importance of cultivating relations with powerful players of different ethnic affiliations in the jade trade. In the two deals, Hamid directly and indirectly dealt with people of four ethnicities; a Rohingya broker; a Wa army general, who acts both as a conflict mediator and a broker; a deceitful (Chinese) Kokang jade buyer and alleged mafia member; Chinese jade buyers from Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Beijing; and a Burmese jade supplier. Trust is essential in the jade trade, and Hamid encountered the risk of loosing investments to a Kokang buyer, who simply did not pay for his purchases. In Hamid's narrative, his powerful ally, a general of the UWSA, promised to fend off this risk. As with other types of trade in illegal goods, social skills may need to be supplemented by threats and demonstration of a potential for conducting violence (see Adler 1993: 95; Wacquant 1998: 3). However, Hamid later offered information that contradicts parts of the story presented above. The last section of this chapter suggests that the Kokang jade buyer, who cheated Hamid, is a Rohingya man, and offers an explanation of why Hamid would lie about his ethnicity.

Hamid occasionally pointed out Rohingya men in the jade bazaar, whom he said were mafia men and heroin traders. In the interview below, which was conducted a

year before Hamid's trip to Wa State, I asked Hamid why he does not wear jade jewellery.

> I don't like gemstones. Our Islam says that a man is not allowed to wear diamonds and gold. Allow only if you are travelling, and you don't have money. Like a ring, you can sell if you have problem. My mother asks me when I was a student, "Son, a lot of your friends wear gold ring, necklace. Why you don't wear?" I reply, "Islam does not allow it". So my mother says "very good my son". She is proud of me [laughs]. Some uneducated people don't care about Islam. So they wear gold and jade.
>
> Some rich men in Ruili, before they were very poor in Arakan. They get rich here. So they wear gold, jade. Before, they do business, you know, No. 4 [heroin]. They carry to Kunming, Shanghai, Beijing. They can get a lot of money. They buy from Wa State people. They [Wa people] are like mafia. They have a lot of people in Ruili also. My Rohingya friend is very close to them. He always asks me "you want to come with me to Wa State"? I tell him "I'm afraid". When he arrives there with jade, the army brings him inside Wa State. He said "I will introduce you to the General if you want to do business". So I tell him "I am afraid, I don't want to do No. 4 business" [laughs]. Wa State is like terrorist area. They are at war.
>
> I: Is there a lot of No. 4 here in Ruili?
>
> A lot. Chinese police, before they didn't know [about heroin]. Now they check. Before Burmese government sells. When send from Ruili to Kunming, people put [heroin] inside big fish.[64]

Hamid's Rohingya friend seemed to have an import-export deal with his Wa contacts, bringing jade stones to the Wa State from Ruili, and returning with heroin. As noted in Chapter 3, jade and drug smuggling routes from northern Myanmar into Yunnan seem largely to coincide, and some smugglers allegedly hide heroin and amphetamines inside hollow jade stones. Hamid disassociated himself from the heroin trade both on moral grounds and on fear. In this interview, he said he was afraid to go to Wa State, but as we have seen, he went there one year later. Hamid's self-representation seems

[64] As another example of the creativity of smugglers, police found methamphetamine hidden inside a statue of Mao Zedong in a drug bust Hong Kong in May 2019 (*South China Morning Post*, 7 May, 2019).

to comprise a balancing between a moral code tied to Islam, and a jade trade linked with heroin dealers, smugglers, mafia people, and ethnic insurgent armies.

## Ethnicity and Human-Nonhuman Relations in Cockfighting

In his spare time, Hamid bred fighting cocks and attended cockfights. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday saw cockfights in a Dai village on the southern outskirts of Ruili, while cockfights were held in Muse on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The organizers and most participants were Dai/Shan people, while also some Jingpo/Kachin, Bamar, Rohingya, and Uyghur attended. Constituting a masculine leisure site, the cockfighting arena allowed for the cultivation of interethnic networks, which could be functional in the jade trade.

In Ruili, opponents should be of similar size, but Hamid said that Shan organizers in Muse would match fighting cocks of different sizes, skills, and strength, and often know beforehand which one would win. He further said that some Shan breeders in Muse smear tiger blood on their fighting cocks, which makes the other cock scared of attacking. Also in Muse, some breeders allegedly feed amphetamine to their fighting cock, which makes him more energetic and less susceptible to pain. Hamid described such practices as morally wrong. One of Hamid's fighting cocks was kept and fed by a Shan man in Muse for a fee. One time Hamid went there he saw a scratch on the bead of his fighting cock. "He lied to me", Hamid said. "He said he takes care of my cock, but he is fighting with him. You cannot trust these Shan people". Although the Dai/Shan people is the same main ethnic group living on both sides of the national border, different cockfighting practices in Ruili and Muse seemed to induce Hamid to construct a moral geography structured by the national border, which distinguished honest Chinese Dai from cheating Burmese Shan people.

I asked Hamid if cockfighting is illegal in China:

> The government does not allow it. But the Shan are not afraid of Chinese police. They say: "We are fighting [with cocks] in our village, why you come here? This is like a festival for us. If you come again, we will beat you!" Chinese police is afraid of them. They are Chinese Shan, they speak Chinese. Police also arrest me one time in the cockfight. They tell me "show me your passport!" But I don't' have. So they arrest me. They take 500 Yuan from me.

Here, Hamid points to the relative local power and autonomy enjoyed by Dai people, the largest ethnic minority group in Ruili, which in 2012 constituted around 30 per cent of the city's population, and has a strong representation in the local government. While gambling is illegal in China, local practices and morals that posit the cockfight as a kind of cultural heritage - a 'festival' tied to Dai ethnicity – seem to supersede formal law. As a social field of action, the Dai village in Ruili could thus be described with Sally Falk-Moore's (1973) concept of the 'semi-autonomous social field'. As Hamid experienced, the legal semi-autonomy of the Dai village did not apply to visiting Rohingya.

Hamid earned money on breeding and selling fighting cocks, and he gambled money on cockfights. But the fighting cocks were more than mere moneymaking creatures for Hamid, who expressed an almost symbiotic relation with them. He explained:

> I massage the cock every day to make him stronger and make him win [in cockfights]. Massage his neck. I give him meat, prawn, rice, paddy. He sleeps on bamboo to make his claws stronger. He is also swimming. He is like a dragon. If you want to fight with a cock, you must take good care of him. He's like a child.

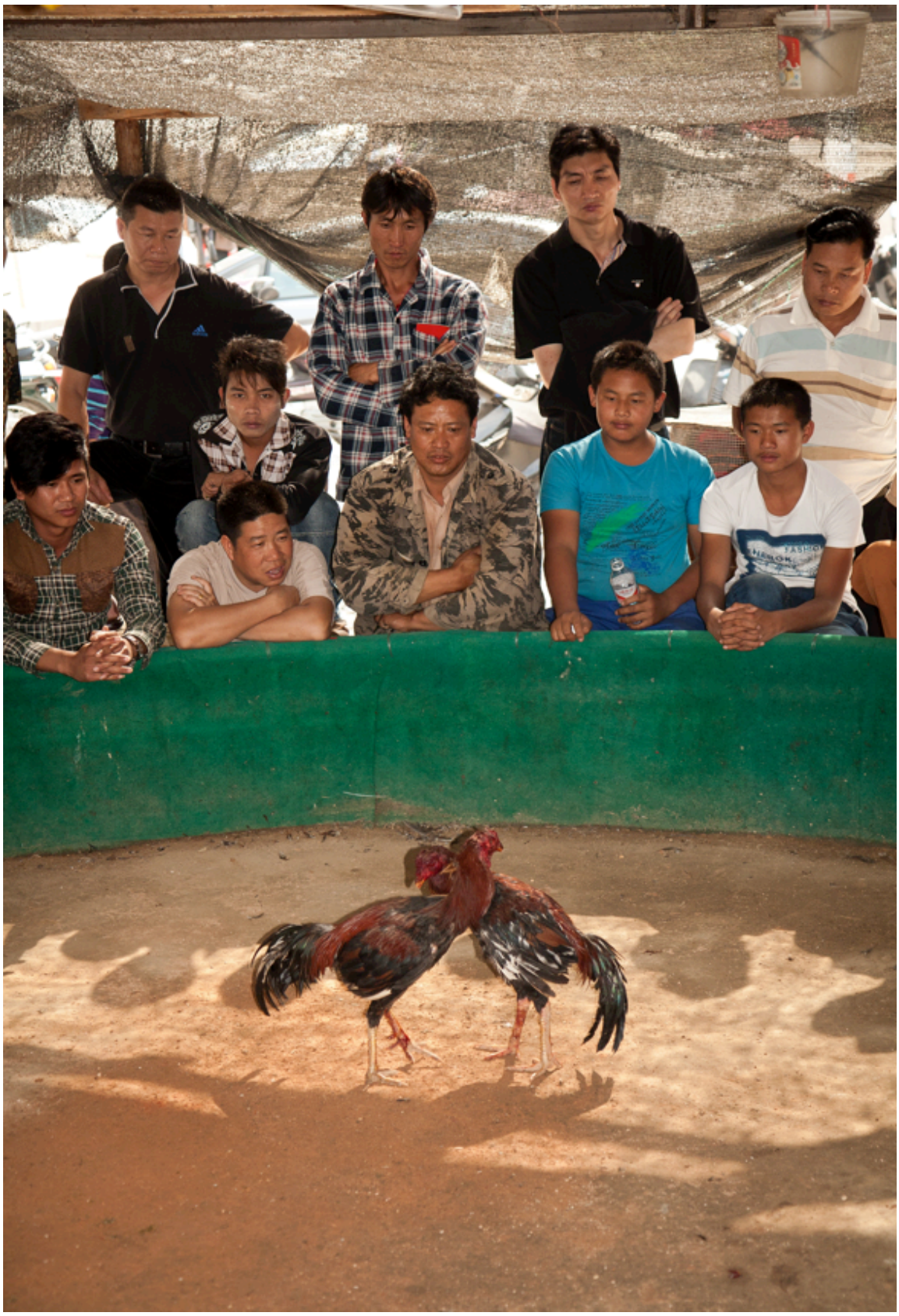
Hamid accentuates the agility and ferocity of his fighting cock by comparing him to the mythical dragon, but also suggests that he is like a human child, dependent on care. The fighting cock thus seems to possess both nonhuman and human characteristics and needs. Hamid gave his fighting cocks names like Rambo, Tyson, The Undertaker, and Hitler. Inspired by a universe of human heroes and villains, Hamid's chosen names signify the fighting skills and personality of his fighting cocks. Hamid further attributes characteristics to fighting cocks based on their 'ethnicity'. He says that Vietnamese cocks are small and fast, Shan cocks large and strong, and Uyghur cocks big but slow, while Chinese cocks lack aggressiveness.

In Raffles' (2010: 74-116) discussion of cricket fighting in Shanghai, breeders assume a perspective, where they are both similar to, and different from crickets. The crickets are here not just interpreted into some pre-existing cosmology. The ontological entanglement between breeders and crickets "is possible only because of the insects themselves, which are not merely the opportunity for culture but its co-authors" (ibid: 100). In order to be successful in cockfighting, Hamid needs to understand the needs and personality of his fighting cocks, which likewise requires of him to temporarily assume nonhuman perspectives. Lévi-Strauss (1962: 89) argument that the use of natural species as totems is "not because they are 'good to eat' but

because they are 'good to think'" privileged a generic function of different totem species in representing social distinctions over their particular inherent properties. Conversely, Bennet (2010: ix) emphasises the "distinctive capacities or efficacious power of particular material configurations". Hamid's distinctions between fighting cocks in terms of their fighting skills, personality, and ethnicity are made using pre-configured categories, but the particular characteristics and behaviour of individual fighting cocks also 'efficaciously' activates, reinforces, and moulds those categories. This is to emphasize an active role of the nonhuman in co-configuring human social-symbolic orders.

Some Rohingya norms and taboos concerned fighting cocks as a generic species, rather than characteristics of individual cocks. The Muslim taboo against eating pork is extended to the fighting cocks. Hamid said that the fighting cocks would die if they ate pork; it is like poison to them. He said that Shan people will eat a fighting cock if he dies in battle. "But we Rohingya never do that", he laughed. "The dead cock must be buried". Brought into effect by the 'efficacious' materiality of the fighting cocks, such cultural rules and taboos distinguished ethnic affiliations for Hamid.

The cocks fight in rounds of 15 minutes, followed by a five minutes break. A cock has lost the fight, when he is injured, is too tired to attack, or jumps out of the arena. A referee makes this call. The spectators offer bets that change as the fight proceeds and are settled after each fight. Hamid observes a rule that when a fighting cock has won six fights, he will retire. Hamid calls these 'Master cocks', and uses them for breeding.



**21.** Cockfight in a Dai village outside Ruili. Photo by the author.

**22.** The fighting cock Rambo had won five cockfights, and fought back three dogs attacking him. Photo by the author.

# “They are Burmese Dogs!” Conceptualizing an Interethnic Conflict

The fighting cock Rambo had won five fights. Hamid moved Rambo to a construction site located halfway up a small hill east of Ruili. Hamid’s cousin is married to a Shan woman, who bought the plot, and was building a house there. A concrete-covered brick wall encircles the plot, hosting an entrance made up by an iron gate. At my first visit, I was surprised to learn that the crew of workers building the house are Buddhist Bamar Burmese, but Hamid said that they got along well.

One day, Hamid called and asked me to accompany him to the construction site. Three dogs had entered the construction site and attacked his fighting cocks and hens. Rambo was severely bitten and another fighting cock had been killed, alongside two hens. I filmed as Hamid re-enacted the event:

> There were three dogs. They dig under the fence and attacked the cocks and hens. I feel very sad now. Rambo returns the fight. He is not afraid. But they are three dogs, dangerous. Dogs don’t eat chicken, but these dogs are like wolf.
>
> We chase the dogs. The two big dogs climb the stairs [to the roof of the building]. I tell my cousin “when they come down you must hit them on the head or neck”. The neck has nerves, if you hit there, he dies. Its like kung fu, you cut the nerves. I come to the roof with long knife [machete]. The dogs are hiding, lying down. They pretend to be good dog. I hit one dog on the head, but he’s not bleeding. The knife is not sharp. The two dogs run down. My brother hits one of them, but they escape under the fence. The smallest dog doesn't escape, he hides inside the toilet. So my cousin made [a noose of] rope. [Hamid demonstrates] My cousin catches him with rope. Hangs him. He’s hanging, but not dead. If I don’t kill him, they will come every day and kill the cocks and the hens. So I hit his neck with iron stick. I really feel sad. I don't kill any animals. But yesterday I kill cause I am very angry.
>
> The hens are all scared now. They think the dog is coming, so they don’t eat. They are ready to hide. They jumped to a hole, the dogs could not catch them there. They are very clever. Rambo is still eating. He is not afraid. He is a warrior. If a dog bites a chicken, he cannot eat mutton. Same for people. Other meat is okay, like beef. But if I feed him mutton now, he will die.

[Hamid goes into a room, where the construction workers had been sleeping] The workers left. Went to Myanmar. They are afraid.

I: Afraid of the dogs?

No, of us… Muslims [laughs nervously]. Cause Muslims and Buddhists are fighting, so they think that we will kill them. So I explain to them. "No, we don't fight you. We live together like family".

I: Do you know where the dogs came from?

They are Burmese dogs! In the village up there are Burmese people. Bad people. They are drinking and making trouble with Muslims. I think those dogs come from up there. My cousin fights with them before. They abused him.

Hamid's re-enactment of the dog attack points to an agentive role of the nonhuman in human ethnic identification. Hamid said that dogs usually do not eat chicken, but that these dogs "were like wolves"; that is, acting beyond their normal instincts and inclinations as a species. Even facing three 'wolf-like' dogs, Rambo fought bravely like a warrior. Also, both the dogs and the hens expressed a distinctive cleverness. The hens hid in a hole, anticipating that the dogs could not reach them there, and the dogs were almost like humans; when threatened, they pretended to be 'good dogs'. Something beyond normal animal behaviour thus seemed at play in Hamid's presentation of the dog attack.

Hamid did not seem to know for certain where the dogs came from, but he still classified them as Burmese dogs. This classification was plausibly based on conflicts with a group of Buddhist Bamar Burmese people, who had previously abused Hamid's cousin. It was as if malicious intentions of the Bamar people were instilled in the dogs, the Bamar exercising their distributed agency through the dogs attacking cocks and hens, which in turn were a kind of extension of their Rohingya breeder. Alfred Gell (1998: 20, 36-38) discussed the art object as a 'secondary agent' in the sense that it embodies, concretises and exercises human intensions and agency. The dog attack, I suggest, provides a case for extending this analysis of art objects to cover a broader category of the nonhuman that includes animals.

Clifford Geertz (1979) famously analysed the Balinese cockfight as a meaningful event that told the Balinese about their 'social matrix', including the local status hierarchy: "Its function, it you want to call it that, is interpretive: It is a Balinese

reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1979: 218). While Geertz's analysis demonstrates how human relationships can be made 'readable' through animals, the Balinese social hierarchy is objectified primarily through human betting practices during the cockfight, rather than through the animals themselves. Here, I suggest that the biological forms, instincts, and potentials of dogs and chicken as respectively predator and prey facilitate Hamid's conceptualisation of the interethnic relationship between Rohingya and Bamar as one concerning perpetrators and victims. Rather than seeing these animals as passive signified matter incorporated into a fixed cosmology, I suggest we see their particular inherent potentials as 'conduits for concept production' (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 7) and 'technologies of the imagination' (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009), and thus as active co-constructors of human imaginations of ethnicity.

The conflict-ridden interethnic relation between Rohingya and Bamar Burmese may follow them from Myanmar into China. The fact that the Bamar Burmese construction workers left after violence escalated inside Myanmar, because they were afraid that their Rohingya employers in Ruili would attack them, exemplifies how interethnic relations in Ruili were influenced by events unfolding across the border.

## "Allah will punish him!" Reconsidering an Intraethnic Conflict

In the fall of 2015, Hamid's brother wrote to me that Hamid had been severely attacked in Ruili, and sent me a video clip of Hamid lying in a hospital bed, his arms and legs covered in bandages. A week later, Hamid sent me the following message:

> Some of my enemies attack me in Ruili. I ask about my money, he owes me money. So he calls Shan people. Bad guys. They attack me in front of our mosque. I'm very hurt, so pray for me.
>
> [A week later]: Six men attack me with iron sticks and long knives. Shan people. Contract killers.
>
> I: Who ordered the attack?

> He is Rohingya man from Ruili, uneducated Muslim. I will revenge all. But I cannot fight yet, just practice. My Wa friends say they will come and catch them.

A few weeks later, Hamid via Facebook offered me information, which requires a consideration both of tensions and dilemmas that Hamid negotiated when providing narratives about Rohingya ethnic identification, alliances and conflicts, and of the predicament of doing qualitative research. Hamid told me that he was planning to move to Bangladesh, and would never return to Ruili, because he was deeply disappointed by the behaviour and lack of support for him in the Rohingya community.

> I really hurt about some Rohingya people. All are betrayers. No one help me in Ruili, when I was hurt. Chairman [of Ruili's Jade Trade Association], he is my grandpa. He is also bad man. Only my younger brother helps me. Some Rohingya are very bad. No trust in Allah. Allah will punish them.
>
> This Rohingya man, before I never stay with him, because he is low personality. Uneducated Muslim. He comes to my room every day, and asks me "please give me some jade, I sell, and I give you money back". He wants a commission after sell. So I help him. His friend is bad guy. They are selling heroin, from Ruili to Kunming. So I don't want to speak with them. But he comes every day, asks me about jade. Then I give him 28 pieces of jade. After one month, I meet him in Ruili. I ask him about jade. He replied me that "I lost your jade in Kunming". He said that someone robbed him. So we quarrel. After that he called bad guys. Suddenly they attack me from behind. Shan people. All have long knives. Six people attack me in my legs, then also in my neck. I am very hurt brother. I want to cry when I remember this day.
>
> Allah will punish him! He was arrested [after the attack], but they give money, and police release him. Now he is arrested again for his bad business [heroin business].
>
> How much I love, how much I trust in my Rohingya people. I never lie. I lied to you. Then how much I love my Rohingya people you think? I don't want to say to you that some of our Rohingya people are bad. I never lie my friend, forgive me, first time I lied to you. I was fighting for our Rohingya people in Arakan, and then they try to kill me in Ruili.

I realised that the man who ordered the attack on Hamid is the same man that Hamid previously told me had cheated him, when he was in the Wa State. In both narratives, the man had acquired 28 jade stones from Hamid without paying him, and had not been in contact with Hamid for a month. In Hamid's first narrative, he said the man was Kokang, but Hamid now said that he knows the man well, and that he is Rohingya. Hamid said that he lied to me about the ethnicity of the Rohingya man, who cheated him and ordered the attack on him, because "I don't want to say to you that some of our Rohingya people are bad". The lie, he implied, signified his love for his Rohingya people.

Hamid did not reply my messages from From October 2015 to February 2019, when he called me and said he had just been released from prison in Myanmar. Recovering from the attack in Ruili, Hamid had traveled to Yangon. Here, he met the Rohingya man, who ordered the attack on him, and Hamid beat him up. Hamid was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison, two of which were punishment for his travelling out of Myanmar without an identity card. "Prison was very hard", he said, "every night I was thinking so much, and I could not sleep. But the food was good. Four times a week, we had chicken for dinner!" Aged 39, Hamid was now reconciled with his family in his village in the Arakan State after 20 years abroad. Hamid now planned to go to Yangon again, where he hoped to bribe an official to acquire an identity card, which he would use to travel to Guangzhou in Southeast China, where he had a friend doing jade trade.

## Narrative Ambiguities and Intraethnic Positioning

In this chapter, I have discussed how a Rohingya jade trader in Ruili experiences his ethnic identity and positions himself in relation to other ethnic groups and within the Rohingya community in Ruili. Fleeing the Arakan State, most Rohingya men in Ruili found work in the jade trade, where many of them cultivated business relations with different ethnic groups. The cross-border jade trade in that sense creates economic opportunities for Rohingya, but also some degree of social integration in China.

On the other hand, we have seen how interethnic conflicts in Myanmar can spill across the border into China. One way in which Hamid conceptualized interethnic conflicts was by envisioning an unequal relation between ethnic human perpetrators and victims in terms of an analogous relation between animal predator and prey. Here, the manifestation of what Descola (2013b: 118) posits as a universal separation

between self and the other, is played out between two ethnic animal-human dyads, rather than between human and animal. This may serve as an invitation to scrutinize in closer detail how inherent particularities of nonhuman agents afford human conceptions of our selves, and of other humans.

Furthermore, Hamid indicated that the jade trade is entangled with mafia-like organisations and ethnic militias engaged in drug trade. The Myanmar-China jade trade constitutes a largely informal economy, and loosely regulated flows of large sums of money carry a potential for violence that may dissolve ethnic and social affiliations. The last violent attack on Hamid was based on a conflict about money in the jade trade, and ordered by a Rohingya. The attack reinforced Hamid's self-representation as a person of moral superiority and a victim of injustices by supporting his formulation of distinctions within Ruili's Rohingya jade trade community based on education and adherence to Islam. Hamid posits illicitly gained monetary wealth, which does not support the long-term reproduction of the ethnic community in the form of alms or remittances, as immoral. This moral formulation resonates with Bloch and Parry's (1989) discussion of the relation between 'a cycle of long-term exchanges' connected with the reproduction of a larger social order and 'a cycle of short-term exchanges', which is "associated with individual appropriation, competition, sensuous enjoyment" (ibid: 23-24). As in the case of alms and remittances, money gained in the cycle of short-term exchanges may support the longer-term reproduction of the community, but in moral terms it is usually the case that "when the short-term cycle threatens to replace the long-term cycle then the world is rotten" (ibid: 28). Hamid's self-positioning further seems structured by an ideology of masculine (fictive) kinship. The figures of brother, father, male cousin, uncle, and grandfather feature prominently in his social world, and betrayals by (fictive) kin are perhaps most grave, because they are not to be expected.

In the aggregate, Hamid's narratives formulate a predicament of Rohingya as victims in an unequal interethnic conflict. Hamid's changed the ethnicity of a betrayer from Rohingya to Kokang in his narrative, because he conceived of intraethnic betrayal amongst Rohingya as potentially tarnishing to that image. This narrative ambiguity serves as a reminder to pay attention to why informants say what they do; both about other ethnic groups, about the ethnic group they identify with, and about their own roles and positions within that group.

# 7. Order: Jade Nomenclature, Analogies, and Valuation

> Chinese philosophy most fully reveals what appears to be a central feature of any analogical ontology, namely the difficulty of distinguishing in practice among the components of existing beings, between that which stems from interiority and that which stems from physicality
>
> - Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, p. 206.

People order phenomena horizontally by identifying qualitative differences and meanings, and vertically by grading them in terms of value. Such distinctions and valuations vary with the properties of phenomena, and with the human languages, methods, parameters, motivations, and practical engagements employed in categorising and valuing them. Valuations may thus provide insights into characteristics of the phenomena valued, and into conceptualisations among those who value them. This chapter discusses how mineralogical properties and ontological assumptions interplay in vernacular Chinese valuations of feicui, and further how grading of feicui is sometimes applied analogically to male grading of women.

Anna Tsing (2013) points to how capitalist accumulation depends on converting stuff created in various ways, including photosynthesis and animal metabolism, into capitalist commodities. The most temporally extensive 'labour' performed to create feicui has occurred as chemical and physical processes in particular geological environments, and perceptible properties of feicui thus created have sustained over very long time.[65] As Chinese jade carvers, traders and consumers value this 'natural' genesis and temporal durability of feicui (see also Walsh 2010), I here foreground classifications in valuations of feicui, rather than human labour in the form of mining

[65] Qiu *et. al.* (2008) and Shi *et. al.* (2009: 186) estimate that some Myanmar jadeite was formed in the Late Jurassic period (approximately 163,5 to 145 million years ago), while according to Hughes *et. al.* (2000: 6), the bodies of serpentinized peridotite characterising the Jade Tract in Kachin State were formed between the Late Crecaceous (100,5 to 66 million years ago) and the Eocene age (56 to 33,9 million years ago).

or carving. While social scientists often discuss economic value as deriving from production, exchange, and consumption (Ensminger 2002; Hann and Hart 2011; Wilk 1996; Swedberg 2007), I focus instead on how Ruili's jade traders make value by attaching concepts, typologies, and graduations to singular feicui pieces. This process may be described with Tsing's (2013) concept of 'assessment work', which "allows us to consider how the commodity form can be made without industrial labor through a process of translation" (ibid: 23). Translations of feicui materials into concepts facilitate their incorporation into markets as distinguishable types hosting graded characteristics and qualities, thus connecting a highly diverse feicui stock with a culturally specific hierarchy of value.

Robert Proctor (2001) argues that, alongside factors like intense advertising and changing marital history, the *homogeneity* of diamonds – what he calls their 'absence of character' (ibid: 384) - has played a crucial role in constituting diamonds as a 'social currency' in the form of engagement rings, and thus contributes in making diamonds more expensive than coloured gemstones. That is to say "there are inherent features of the stone that lend themselves to this unique status as the gemstone of marriage" (ibid: 398). The quite standardised manifestations of diamonds – transparency, lack of colour (for the majority), and susceptibility to faceting – makes them relatively easily commensurable. This chapter conversely suggests that the *singularity* of feicui - its diversity as a generic material - restricts the emergence of a single unambiguous scale of valuation. Feicui shares this restriction of standardised valuation due to its singularity with other coloured gemstones like emeralds, rubies, and sapphires.[66] However, Ruili's markets host much greater variation in their stock of feicui than in those of other coloured gemstones, which are often set as complementary stones in feicui jewellery. This is so in terms of size, as those other coloured gemstones that are sold in the rough rarely exceed a size that can be set in a finger ring, whereas the feicui stock spans from polished earring-sized pieces weighing a few grams to rough boulders weighing several tonnes. It is certainly also the case for colours, which span a wide spectrum in the feicui stock, whereas other coloured gemstones generally feature their 'traditional' colours, as manifest in the vernacular

[66] Brazeal (2017) argues that the material characteristics of emeralds make them impossible to value with consistency, while Naylor (2010: 136) notes how "since each emerald is unique, valuation is highly subjective". In the case of sapphires, Walsh (2004: 228) remarks: "Every sapphire is unique and might be evaluated as such. Thus, a large sapphire that is transparent and royal blue but has inclusions must be evaluated differently than the same stone without inclusions". Hughes (1997) likewise notes that it is "extremely difficult to come up with logical price tables for ruby and sapphire".

terms used for them; green for emerald ('green gemstone', *lübaoshi*), blue for sapphire ('blue gemstone', *lanbaoshi*), and red for ruby ('red gemstone', *hongbaoshi*).

The perceptible mineralogical heterogeneity of feicui is coupled with conceptual diversification in the form of a rich vernacular nomenclature, which signifies individual feicui pieces through analogies, typologies and hierarchies of value. The relationship between signification and valuation may be understood with David Graeber's (2001) structuralist notion of value as meaningful differences. Graeber writes: "Value is simply meaning; giving value to something is a matter of defining it by placing in some broader set of conceptual categories" (ibid: 40). Ruili's jade traders make feicui valuable by constructing similarities and differences that often take the form of analogies between properties of feicui and other nonhuman and human phenomena. I suggest that this way of conceptualising, which establishes a series of relations between singular elements, exemplifies what Descola (2013b: 201-232) discusses as 'analogical ontology'.[67]

While I have posited homogeneity and singularity as perceived inherent features of diamonds and feicui, respectively, Dekker (2016: 105) notes with Kopytoff (1986) how "goods bought and sold in markets for singular goods often oscillate between the two poles of 'commodification and commensuration' on the one hand and 'singularization' on the other". This directs focus on conceptual manoeuvres performed by Ruili's jade traders to transform a piece of feicui from a singular incommensurable material into a commensurable commodity, where money 'commensurate incommensurabilities' by bringing disparate things under a 'common rubric' (Carruthers and Espeland 1998: 1400, cited in Maurer 2006: 16). I thus identify typologies and hierarchies of value and commensuration for feicui in Ruili, albeit these are not as clear-cut and standardised as those of diamonds or gold. One way in which value hierarchies are established and maintained in markets for singular goods is through the functioning of 'exemplary goods', a term that Dekker (2016: 104) defines thus: "The exemplary good is (one of the) currently prominent goods, which acts as reference or focal point for the identification of the relevant qualities of a particular type of good for consumers". Thus, other goods perceived to be of the same type "are in turn compared, related and contrasted to these exemplary goods, which can be thought of as focal points for coordination on meaning and quality" (ibid: 120). In China, such 'exemplary' pieces of feicui guide a crystallization of consumer demand, which, in turn, underpins valuation.

[67] Julie Chu (2010: 138) uses the somewhat similar term 'Chinese correlative cosmology'.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first conceptualise a 'scientific' language of gemmology and a 'vernacular' Chinese language employed by Ruili's jade traders as 'sieves' that potentially constitute jadeite and feicui as ontologically different types of matter. Next, I argue that whereas Modern Western naturalistic science strives for unambiguity of terms for phenomena perceived to be reducible into entities, Ruili's jade traders make singular feicui pieces commensurable through analogies that cut across domains like human and nonhuman. I then spell out a vernacular Chinese feicui nomenclature, which demonstrates a use of analogies in determination and valuation of the material. The next section relates how some Han Chinese feicui traders in Ruili linked a hierarchy of value for jade to a ethnic sexualised hierarchy of value for women. Finally, I consider how certain jadeite pieces function as 'exemplars' or 'prototypes' that guide a crystallisation of consumer demand, and reiterates that considering a dialectics between mineralogical properties and situated human ontologies may contribute to a better understanding of how feicui is made economically valuable.

## Sieves: Distinguishing and Constituting Matter

Two 'languages' are significant in understanding how jadeite / feicui is determined and made economically valuable. I label the first a *scientific language*, which is rooted in Western gemmology, and point to *mutual exclusion* and *reduction* as two methods for determining jadeite and its properties in this language. Gemmological determination can work through mutual exclusion, insofar as jadeite is determined by excluding the possibility of it being another gemstone. Some indications of jadeite are manifest within mutually exclusive indices. For example, a hardness of 6 to 6 ½ on Moh's scale indicates nephrite, whereas a hardness of 6 ½ to 7 indicates jadeite. Gemmological determination of jadeite can also work through reduction by identifying the material on the basis of its chemical formula, or in the sense that colour is in some cases seen as a result of inclusions and trace elements in its crystalline structure; most notably chromium, iron, and graphite (Walker 1991: 24; Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 3). Gemmologists often refer to inclusions in jadeite as 'impurities', and Naylor (2010: 141) notes how chromium "usually messes up the interior of a crystal". One might think that the 'purer' and more homogenous a gemstone is, the higher quality and value it comprises. From a gemmological perspective this is not so for jadeite, and this fact allows us to compare assumptions

about what is considered pure, natural and valuable in the scientific language versus in the vernacular language.

Gemmologists distinguish between the *mineral* 'jadeite', which is a pyroxene (rock-forming chain silicate), and the *rock* 'jadeitite' (a metamorphic rock hosting jadeite). The highest valued jadeite types are not 'natural' crystals, but jadeite aggregates. Nor are they 'primary' or 'pure' jadeitite rocks, but rather 'deformed' and 'recrystallized', processes resulting from rotation recrystallization and Grain Boundary Migration (GBM). 'Primary' jadeitite, in turn, "has undergone little or no ductile deformation", and is coarse-grained and to variable degrees porous (Shi *et. al.* 2009: 187). Their quality is not considered as precious and gem-quality, but they can be utilized as B-quality jade (ibid: 187, 188). Neither the rock jadeitite, nor the mineral jadeitic pyroxene is chemically pure.

Proctor (2001) argues that diamond is the quintessentially 'modern stone', which has been promoted as a 'precious stone' because of its intrinsic qualities of being transparent, brilliant, patterned, homogeneous, and mineralogically pure (pure elemental carbon), as opposed to 'semi-precious stones', which have been denigrated for being opaque, plain, diverse, and local (ibid: 397, 404). The term 'semiprecious' was popularised after diamond company De Beers mounted a propaganda campaign to boost the prestige of diamonds above all coloured stones, and came to be widely used at about the time that words like 'semiskilled' and 'semiliterate' came into fashion (ibid: 403). Such linguistic affinity between market stratification for gemstones and social stratification of people may institutionalise, as "practices of the market and the state implicitly create a hierarchy of values that is no longer discussed and thus constitutes a hegemonic environment that silences alternative valuations" (Otto and Dalsgaard 2016: 3-4). Proctor proposes that the idea of a single scale of 'preciousness' be seen as a modernist abstraction that hardly captures the different valuations and incommensurable scales of appraisal for different stones in different cultures (ibid: 405). While colored stones are graded essentially by the same standards, some gemmologists argue that given its value and distinctive features, jade warrants its own evaluation system (Keverne 1991: 20). Today, the term 'semi-precious' has generally fallen out of use because of its derogatory meaning (Schumann 1976: 10). Stones that are rare and considered beautiful and valuable are generally considered 'precious', but this term is still used to promote certain stones above others. Usually, only diamond, emerald, ruby, and sapphire are classified as 'traditional

precious stones'.[68] Still, a promotional leaflet that I received on a tour in the jade company Orchid Jade in Chiang Mai perhaps unsurprisingly included jade among the 'five top precious stones in world'. Naylor (2010: 152) also argues that fine jade fits the description of 'precious stones', but "given how common is the ordinary variety, it is not usually so classified". Naylor thus emphasises scarcity as a qualification requirement for being considered precious stones.

According to Proctor (2001), the rise of diamonds as the 'gemstone of marriage' is also underpinned by the abovementioned distinction between rocks and minerals. A mineral is chemically homogeneous, whereas rocks can be made up of several minerals. This distinction was related to the modern development of mineralogy as a sub-branch of chemistry and a push towards identifying 'pure' mineral species, which encompassed a 'rhetoric of purity' (ibid: 405). On the basis of Proctor's discussion, we might consider the heterogeneity and lack of mineralogical 'purity' in both jadeitite rocks and jadeitic pyroxene minerals as contributing to the lower status of jadeite, as compared to diamonds, in Modern Western minds and markets.

Secondly, we can identify a *vernacular language* manifested in evaluations of feicui by jade traders in Ruili. These evaluations mainly address properties of feicui as sensorial perceived, and often work by establishing *analogies* to other nonhuman phenomena, and to humans. If reduction distils meanings of materials in an interiorising search for 'pure' essences, analogising expands them through externalising associations, and we may roughly posit the ontological constitution of jadeite versus feicui in respectively the scientific and vernacular languages as based on entities versus relations. Geneticists separate between *genotype*, which refers to the full hereditary information of an organism, and *phenotype*, which is its actual observed properties, such as morphology or behaviour. I suggest that gemmology addresses jadeite as a genotype by using its hereditary information (here chemical composition) as a distinguishing parameter, whereas the vernacular Chinese language constitutes feicui as a phenotype by addressing its observable properties like colour and texture. Determining the genotype of a material as jadeite through gemmological methods can be relevant in establishing consumer trust in its authenticity. But gemmological methods are insufficient for understanding how observable properties (phenotype) of feicui give rise to culturally specific associations that make the material economically valuable in China. Hughes *et. al.* (2000: 2) thus note that "an understanding of jade

[68] See, for example, the online gemstone auction website gemrockauctions.com https://www.gemrockauctions.com/learn/additional-gemstone-information/a-list-of-precious-and-semi-precious-gemstones-and-their-treatments (last accessed 11 August, 2017).

is not limited to the technical or exacting, but is about feeling, a feeling for a culture, a feeling for the textural, ephemeral qualities".

We may approach the difference between the 'scientific' and 'vernacular' language outlined above in terms of a distinction between a 'naturalist' and an 'analogist' ontology. The latter distinction is part of Descola's (2013b) discussion of how an opposition between nature and culture has solidified with Enlightenment philosophy in Modern Western naturalism, while other ontological modes expose a less mutually exclusive distinction. Descola's characterisation of naturalism resonates with Robert Bishop's (2007: 106) argument that Western Enlightenment philosophy adopted the tendency of natural sciences "to ignore or abstract away from the rich appearance of things […] in the pursuit of pure knowledge". These abstractions "allow science to regard the world in an objectified way […] as made up of inherently meaningless objects in causal interaction with one another" (ibid.). This reduction of manifestations of the 'natural' world to measurable, meaningless units contrasts Descola's characteristic of analogism, which expands the meanings of phenomena by establishing potentially infinite series of associative relations between them.

One way to conceptualise the two languages, or ontologies, is as 'sieves', which classify and distinguish phenomena into different domains. Sieves can be seen as analytical, metaphorical, and conceptual devices, which not only separate matter, but also in that process constitute both matter and us humans as classifiers. Kockelman (2013: 36) thus suggests, "we apperceive through our sieves as much as we sieve through our apperception. We appersieve, if you will. Or […] we are our sieves" (ibid: 36). This conception of the sieve resonates with Karen Barad's (2003) discussion of phenomena as determined through 'agential cuts' within material-discursive 'apparatuses'. While drawing upon a Foucauldian tradition that emphasizes power, intensions and agency in the determination of phenomena, Barad is also influenced by the work of Danish nuclear physicist, Niels Bohr, who showed how light, depending on the instruments used to determine it, can be seen both as waves and particles. Here, instruments are active contributors in constituting the phenomena they allow humans to 'see'. This approach allows us to suggest that a gemmologist identifying a stone as jadeite with a microscope and a trader in Ruili identifying the same stone as feicui with his bare eyes amounts to the performance of different sieves constituting jadeite and feicui as two ontologically different types of matter.

## Vagueness versus Pigeon-Holing of Terms

While different linguistic, ontological and material 'sieves' can constitute chemically identical matter as different concepts, jade has been employed in a philosophical argument for a reverse principle, where two chemically different materials are incorporated under a common concept. Discussing the relation between natural kinds and conceptual change, philosopher Joseph LaPorte (2004: 92-102) argues against reducing the meaning of the concept of jade to chemical microstructure. LaPorte uses Hilary Putnam's (1975: 223-227) so-called 'Twin Earth' thought experiment in considering how two chemically distinct minerals – jadeite and nephrite – are both known as jade. Twin Earth is a distant planet like ours, except that the water-like substance on that planet has a long chemical composition that is abbreviated 'XYZ'. Putnam argues that XYZ does not belong in the extension of our word 'water' even if inhabitants of Twin Earth call it water, because it lacks the microstructural composition of what we call water, namely $H_2O$ (LaPorte: 92). LaPorte, however, refutes that the essence of water is $H_2O$, and argues that if confronted with XYZ, we would conclude, "XYZ is water" (ibid.). By incorporating XYZ into our definition of water, we would *refine* the meaning of water, which would thereby change its meaning. LaPorte argues that "the microstructure of samples plays some role in the reference of 'water'", but "the familiar qualities of water also play some role in the reference of 'water'" (ibid.). In Descola's four-fold ontological scheme, Putnam's determination of phenomena reflects a 'naturalist' ontology, insofar as it makes ontological distinctions between phenomena exhibiting similar 'physicalities' (visual characteristics), but dissimilar 'interiorities' (here chemical microstructure) (see Descola 2013b: 172: 201).

As noted, historically the most well-known type of jade in China is the domestically mined nephrite, which has the chemical formula $Ca_2(Mg,Fe)_5Si_8O_{22}(OH)_2$. Putnam would argue that if a new substance with similar properties but a different chemical composition were to be found, it would not be called jade. A mineral with similar observable properties to nephrite did enter China from Burma, in largest quantities after the Qianlong in 1788 initiated imports as tribute from the Burmese King Bodawpaya (Levy and Scott-Clark 2001: 39). In 1860, French and British armies sacked the Summer Palace in Peking, and many jade artefacts were brought as loot to Paris and London, including Burmese jade (ibid:

169-172).[69] In 1863, French mineralogist A. Damour determined the chemical properties of the 'new' jade as $NaAl(SiO_3)_2$, and named it jadeite. But speakers applied the term 'jade' to the two chemically different materials for centuries (LaPorte: 94). Or, in a more precise formulation by Hacking (2007: 271): "Although jadeite was different from the familiar nephrite, and acquired its own battery of specific names, it was taken to be the same generic stuff as nephrite, falling within the extension of '*yu*'". LaPorte sees the acceptance of Burmese jadeite as jade in China as a counterexample to Putnam's Twin Earth lesson, because "speakers encountered a new substance with properties similar to those of a formerly recognized substance but with a completely different microstructure, and speakers responded by applying a term for the formerly recognized substance to the new substance" (ibid: 95). Over time, there has been a subtle change of meaning in the term jade / yu to include jadeite, as vagueness has been refined away (ibid: 97).

LaPorte (96) argues that the Chinese term *yu* was 'vague', until Chinese began to accept jadeite as 'true jade', but Hacking (2007: 275) suggests that due to the ready acceptance of jadeite as *yu* in China "there was never any question, never any perceived ambiguity, and the term was never indeterminate". Resonating with Barad's focus on power, intensions, and agency in the determination of phenomena, Hacking argues that importance is an interest-relative notion, and that normally the 'important' properties of a liquid or solid are the ones that are 'structurally important', whereas other interests dominate for jade; such as aesthetics, ease of carving, and its commercial value (Hacking: 276). In Britain around 1889, the English word 'jade' was largely restricted to nephrite, but the jade trade escalated with the British lease of Hong Kong at the turn of the 19th century, and Hacking argues that it was the fact that Chinese jade traders in Hong Kong considered both nephrite and jadeite to be *yu* that stimulated the term 'jade' to come to cover both materials in the English language (ibid: 273).[70] Commercial use thus seems to have underpinned the naming of materials as '*yu*' and 'jade' on the basis of their observable properties, rather than their chemical microstructure.

LaPorte's argument carves out a distinction between determination of jadeite/feicui based on microstructure versus observable properties, which approximately

[69] Already in 1836, the British Captain Hannay obtained samples of jadeite during his visit to Mogaung in the Kachin State. Meanwhile, Dr. William Griffith was the first European to actually visit the jadeite mines in 1837 (Hughes 1999).

[70] Traders in Hong Kong must have known feicui well prior to 1889. W. Warry reported how the jadeite mining and trade flourished in Kachin state in 1831 to 1840. At this time, Cantonese merchants bought the rough stones in large quantities and carried them back to be cut and polished in Canton (cited in Hughes 1999).

corresponds to one between jadeite as genotype versus feicui as phenotype. The first determination demands certain scientific knowledge, language, and instruments, whereas the second is made through sensory perceptions of Chinese carvers, traders, and buyers. The two approaches are encompassed in my separation between 'scientific' and 'vernacular' languages, or sieves. However, we need to distinguish more clearly than LaPorte does between scientific and vernacular languages, and this involves taking more seriously how jade is classified in Chinese. LaPorte bases his argument on how 'speakers' dispositions' refined the meaning of jade with the introduction of jadeite to China (ibid: 98). He cites Rudler (1911: 122) for arguing that in standard gemmological definition the term jade is "usually restricted by mineralogists to nephrite" (ibid.: 99; see also Schumann 1976: 170; Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 3; Hoffman 2005: 2). But with time, speakers' dispositions have become to include both nephrite and jadeite as 'true jade'. However, LaPorte talks about the English term 'jade', which is not the same as *yu* in Chinese. This confuses his argument, because most Chinese do not know the English word 'jade'. A conflation of 'jade' and '*yu*' further seems to underlie LaPorte's assumption that jade initially signified nephrite, but was refined to include jadeite when that material was introduced to China. This assumption is incorrect insofar as the English word 'jade' initially signified jadeite, while the Chinese word *yu* signified nephrite before jadeite.

While LaPorte concedes that Chinese, who had worked nephrite by hand for generations, could tell by its feel that jadeite was a different material, he writes that the resemblance of nephrite to jadeite is quite thorough, and that "Jadeite is slightly harder than nephrite, but this difference and others between the two minerals can be overlooked in ordinary situations" (ibid: 98, 99). He quotes Sakikawa (1968: 35) for writing that "the resemblances between the two are many and the distinctions limited to matters of hardness, specific gravity, and x-ray analysis – not commonly considered in setting prices of jewels for commercial consumption" (ibid: 99). LaPorte (p. 99) further quotes Wills (1964: 14), who wrote that "the differences between jadeite and nephrite are of greater interest to archaeologists, mineralogists and geologists than they are to collectors. They do not greatly affect the working of either stones, and the wide range of colors of both will be found to overlap so that no rigid rules can be made for their certain identification […] Finally, it may be added that the commercial value of a piece is not normally affected by the fact that it is made from one or the other". Putnam (1975: 241) even rejects that that Chinese distinguish between nephrite and jadeite: "Although the Chinese do not recognize a difference, the term 'jade' applies to two minerals: jadeite and nephrite. Chemically, there is a

marked difference. Jadeite is a combination of sodium and aluminium. Nephrite is made of calcium, magnesium, and iron. These two different microstructures produce the same unique textural qualities!" (cited in Hacking 2007: 269).

Depending on which 'Chinese' we make the argument on behalf of and in which time and place, I am sceptical towards all of these arguments. Based on an examination of historical sources on the spread of Burmese jadeite to China, Sun (2011: 207) notes a shift from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), where the Burma-China trade was dominated by *baoshi* ('gemstones'; including rubies, sapphires, and tourmaline), to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), where Burmese jadeite started to overtake baoshi as a more popular commodity, and feicui appeared as a term. According to Sun, this change "can be traced to shifting fashions in the Chinese court, for often it was the taste of the Chinese emperor and his consorts that dictated the mining and trading of gems in northern Burma" (ibid: 204). Sun argues, "one is on safe ground to say that in 1719 the term feicui was first applied to Burmese jade" (ibid: 203). This application of feicui as a distinctive term for the new material implies that it was clearly distinguished from the known nephrite at this time. One tactile learning experience of my fieldwork was that I eventually came to appreciate the shiny and 'watery' texture, translucency and transparency of good quality feicui, while I found nephrite – *ruan yu* ('soft jade') in Chinese - to be more coarse, dull, lacklustre, and greasy. If the two materials induced me to make such distinctions, professional Chinese carvers and traders must certainly have recognised feicui as a different material than ruan yu, when they first encountered it, which for some was before Damour determined their chemical differences in 1863.

The professional carvers and traders I knew in Ruili certainly distinguish between ruan yu and feicui. As mentioned, the hardness of nephrite is lower than that of jadeite, and carvers argue that it is easier to project and realise design ideas on nephrite than on jadeite, which in turn induce carvers to 'follow' the material itself. Meanwhile, jadeite is typically more granular in texture than nephrite, and thus not as tough, which increases the risk of the material breaking along fissures. Nephrite is an aggregate of micron-wide amphibole fibres densely packed in a felt-like texture. It is supremely tough among all rocks, and is suitable for carving into intricate shapes while retaining its integrity (Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 3). High-grade jadeite, in turn, is typically carved as beads, cabochons, or relatively simple pendants, the task being to 'expose' its intrinsic character. Jadeite is rarely faceted, and its smooth surface in the cabochon or bead is at best semi-transparent as compared to the transparency of facetted ruby, sapphire, emerald, and diamond (Walker 1991: 20). Textural

properties of nephrite and jadeite thus induce different mind-sets and technical approaches for carving. Meanwhile, for traders, the ability to distinguish between the two materials guides their investments and thus their economic profits and losses. In contemporary markets, high-grade feicui is sometimes hundreds of times more expensive per gram than ruan yu.

Professionals in Ruili thus consider ruan yu and feicui entirely different materials, and the generic Chinese term *yu* encompasses a wider range of materials than the English term jade. For example, many traders in Ruili sold *Huanglong yu,* which is a yellow, and orange-coloured cryptocrystalline mineral aggregation with the chemical composition $SiO_2$. Some traders also consider 'yellow ice jade' (*huangbing yu*) and 'water foam jade' (*shui moyu*), as well as agate (*manao*), tourmaline (*bixi*), jasper (*biyu*), and even petrified wood (*shu hua yu*) subtypes of yu. While chemically distinct from nephrite and jadeite, they are placed conceptually on the same horizontal scale as ruan yu and feicui, but graded lower. We must thus distinguish yu as a generic type from other gemstones; between sub-types of yu, including feicui; and between sub-types of feicui.

While I have pointed to a difference in signification of jade between *mutual exclusion* and *reduction* on the one hand, and *analogies* on the other, I claim neither an irreconcilable, nor a teleological divide between 'traditional Chinese' and 'Modern Western' logic and language as manifested in conceptions and constitutions of gemstones. Lévi-Strauss (1966: 23) wrote that "To understand a real object in its totality we always tend to work from its parts". When deciding upon prices to sell or buy for, professionals in Ruili conceptually parcel out, compare, and weigh distinct properties of piece of feicui in a manner that reduces the stone into domains, if not entities, before re-assembling it into a unity that is more than the sum of its parts. Likewise, Proctor's (2001) discussion of the marketing by De Beers of diamonds as 'forever' and 'a girl's best friend' attests to how gemstones in West are also enshrouded in associative relations that make them more than the sum of their constituent parts, for example in the form of a dominant symbol of marriage in many societies.

Both LaPorte's and Putnam's discussions could be read as reflecting a drive towards reducing ambiguity of terms that characterises modern Western naturalism more so than vernacular Chinese language, which in turn often signifies phenomena with analogies. Rather than being initial stages in an inevitable process towards more fixed and precise terms, vagueness, ambiguity, and indeterminacy in Chinese jade nomenclature seem to reflect an ontological flexibility that allows a highly diverse

natural stock of stones to acquire the commercial and spiritual potentials of yu. The subsumption of different materials like jadeite, nephrite, agate, jasper, and tourmaline under the category of yu grinds against positivist ideals of distinctive labelling in Western naturalism. As Hughes, Galibert, Smith and Oo (n.d.) point out: "In the Orient, just about anything translucent and green has been called jade at one time or another. But the Occidental psyche, with its propensity to pigeon-hole, does not sit well with such indifference to definition".

Given the long and close engagements with jade in China, Chinese nomenclature for jade materials is unsurprisingly richer in Chinese than in English. The oldest names for gemstones can be traced back to Oriental languages, Greek, and Latin, and often refer to characteristics like colour, place of discovery, or mysterious powers, while newer names are sometimes devised based on chemical constituents or a person's name (Schumann 1976: 12). Gemstones and jewelry traders have added numerous more names, "mainly to stimulate sales, producing a large number of synonyms and variety names for gemstones" (ibid.). Trading jade presupposes some consensus about terms, but also opens up for development of such terms for traders, who are economically incited to characterise their stones favourably. In that sense, we may assume a 'practical rationality' among Chinese gem traders, which is not radically different from their Western counterparts (see also Obeyesekere 1992). Still, I contend that economic motivations are insufficient for understanding the richness of Chinese jade nomenclature. Descola (2013b) points to how nomenclature in 'analogic ontologies' addresses the diversity of singular beings: "A world of singularities patched together from disparate materials in permanent circulation […] requires powerful mechanisms for paring off, structuring, and classifying for it to become representable or, indeed, simply livable for those who inhabit it" (216-217). Here, to "find one's way through the forest of singularities, one needs a whole battery of symbols and emblems to make it possible to code all this diversity in a hermeneutic grid" (ibid: 227). In Descola's analytical scheme, Chinese analogical jade nomenclature would thus reflect an attempt at imposing order upon a world that is conceived of as constituted by a plurality of singularities.

# Valuation Parameters and Vernacular Nomenclature for Feicui

A trader in Ruili told me that he knows around 100 types of feicui, while another trader said he knows 26 different colours of the material. This terminological variety brings to mind a popular claim that Inuit language has hundreds of words for snow. But according to Dahl (2009), Greenland Inuits only have two basic words for snow, which designate 'falling snow' and 'lying snow', respectively. These can then be extended as a variety of compound nouns, such as 'snowflake', 'blizzard', 'snowdrift', 'sleet', 'ice', and so on, by attaching suffixes to the two nouns. I found that the Chinese nomenclature for feicui is perhaps similar to the Inuit nomenclature for snow in the sense that it is very rich, but that most Chinese characters in this nomenclature do not exclusively designate feicui.

I noted two main types of words used to signify different types, qualities, and properties of feicui. As in the Inuit case, the first type of words is constructed by attaching adjectives or nouns, which describe sensory manifestations like colour, texture, and transparency, to the three characters of *yu*, *fei*, or *cui* to create words like 'hard jade' (*yingyu*), 'wings of a green fly' (*cuixin*), or 'yellow-green feicui' (*huangfei*). Yu (jade) and fei (green jade, Kingfisher) are nouns, while cui can be a noun (Kingfisher, jadeite) or an adjective (emerald green). A second type of words is descriptions or metaphors for properties or types of feicui not containing yu, fei, or cui; for example 'old green colour' (*laolüse*) and 'horse teeth stone' (*mayashi*). Chinese trade names for both nephrite and jadeite include animal and vegetable appellation, (chicken-bone, kingfisher, mutton-fat, nightingale, shrimp, apple, chrysanthemum, melon, moss, peach, and spinach), mineral terms (emerald, sapphire, pearl), and source terms, (Burmese jade, Canadian jade) (Walker 1991: 26).

A promotional leaflet I received in a jade company lists tone, texture, and translucency as parameters for identifying good quality jade, whereas Hughes *et. al.* (2000: 12) add colour, clarity, and cut/carving to translucency and texture. Below, I present vernacular Chinese nomenclature for the following valuation parameters for feicui: 1) Mines; 2) mountain stones and river stones; 3) age; 4) skin; 5) type; 6) colour; 7) transparency; and 8) inclusions. (The nomenclature is listed in the appendix). I demonstrate how this nomenclature often determines and grades feicui through analogies that signify feicui through associative relations to properties of nonhuman and human phenomena, such as foodstuffs, plants, animals, dragons, and

the human skin. Other valuation parameters draw upon more abstract concepts like age and the Taoist *yin-yang* binary.

The presentation of valuation parameters below is based on interviews with Chinese feicui traders and on six guided tours in four large feicui companies in Ruili: The Many Gemstones, the Lucky Jewellery, the Golden Star, and the Prosperous Jade companies. I also took two guided tours in the Thai-Chinese owned Orchid Jade Company in Chiang Mai, which allowed me to compare feicui nomenclature in Ruili with that of Chinese diaspora in Thailand. Each company hosted exhibition halls for carved feicui jewellery and figurines. I had the tour guide explain the terminology of approximately 20-40 feicui pieces in each tour, and photographed each piece and noted its name and characteristics.

In the Many Gemstones Company, shop assistants showed me low-priced feicui jewellery, the company's manager guided me through exhibition cases with medium-grade priced jewellery, and the company director's daughter showed me the most expensive jewellery in a separate space. The different guides for spatially separated categories of feicui linked a social hierarchy in the company with economic value of different categories of feicui. At the Lucky Jewellery, the company owner's daughter guided me on two tours. In the Golden Star Company, two shop assistants guided me, while the company's manager guided me on two tours in the Prosperous Jade Company, and a shop assistant and the manager guided me in the Orchid Jade Company in Chiang Mai.

## Mines

Mines (*kuang*) signify qualities of feicui stones like source of origin does for brand-name products like Chinese tea (see Zhang 2014: 11). Especially the names of famous mines, which are often 'old mines' (*lao kuang*), are seen to indicate a certain quality of feicui.

A shop assistant in Prosperous Jade Company said that traders sometimes try to cheat buyers by saying that a stone is from a better mine than it actually is. The risk of fraud involved in the functioning of mines as brand names attesting to the quality of feicui stones underlines the importance of tactile knowledge about how stones from particular mines look and feel. Chang (2014) relates how visiting the jade mines provided a crucial knowledge for Yunnanese jade traders in Burma: "The process of visiting the jade mines 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" (ibid: 233-234). Such knowledge can translate as profitable deals, while lacking this knowledge can lead to bad deals. This was the case when the jade trade was extended from Myanmar to Mainland China in the mid-1980s, as "local buyers [in Yunnan] were not able to make good evaluations because of their initial lack of trade knowledge, even when stones were cut" (ibid: 234). Knowledge about feicui that derived from their visits to the jade mines in Kachin State thus gave the Yunnannese in Burma a competitive edge against Yunnnanese on the Chinese side of the border. Jade knowledge is still crucial for traders, but is with the current upscaling and increasing Mainland Chinese involvement in mining to some extent being superseded by access to high investment capital. Many Yunnanese in Burma have access and connections in the mining area, whereas Yunnanese in China often have better access to capital-strong Chinese investors and buyers on the east coast. But both groups traverse the national border and are often connected to each other through business and family ties.

## Mountain Stones and River Stones

A distinction between 'mountain stones' (*shanshi*) and 'river stones' (*shuishi*) likewise influences valuation of feicui. Mountain stones are extracted from jadeitite veins or dykes in the mountains, and boulders exposed to weathering host a thick skin of yellowish- to brownish-skinned oxidized material (Nyunt, Massonne and Sun 2017: 298, 307). Kachin people have mined such veins for centuries by heating up the rock with a bonfire until it became porous, and they could chisel it out (Hughes and Ward 2013: 7; Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 7; Walker 1991: 24). Such methods have reportedly been used up to the late 1980s (Nicholl 1988: 218). Nowadays, miners use dynamite to blast away top layers, and excavators and jackhammers to excavate the rocks.

The first step in dike mining is removal of the overburden. This is called 'head cap removal' (*taung moo kyen*) in Burmese. The manager of the Prosperous Jade Company in Ruili analogised 'opening' a jade mountain and a jade stone, positing the stone as a fractal of the mountain, both in its mineralogical composition and in how people engage with the two entities, which in her analogy are distinct in scale, but not in kind. Both in the mountain and in the stone, jadeite runs as 'veins', and investors must infer where to do a 'head cap removal' in the mountain or 'open a window' in the stone in order to find the vein. Descola (2013b: 206) quotes an argument by Marcel Granet (1968) that in ancient China, "society, man, and the world formed the

object of an all-encompassing knowledge constituted solely by the use of analogy". The 'nature' (*xing*) of an existing being "expresses the distinctions that are established between the states of elements and the proportions of their respective mixtures. This immeasurable multiplication of the elementary parts that make up the world is reflected within each one of those parts" (Descola: 207). The dualism of Chinese 'analogical ontology' thus comprises a correlated system of similarities and differences within each 'thing', including jade. This conceptual system would facilitate analogies that span scales, so that a jade stone can be seen as a fractal of a jade mountain.

Hughes and Ward (2013: 7) and Hughes *et al*. (2010: 7) report on how miners recognize and distinguish stones containing feicui in piles of similar-looking ordinary rocks. Miners strike the jadeite boulders with a metal pick. Due to their higher density, feicui stones ring will then like a bell. These stones are also heavier than ordinary rocks, they have a fibrous texture, and they lack particle reflections. Also, jade also feels slightly sticky when wet. Most importantly, the miners look for 'show points', which are areas where the colour shines through the skin. Traders often wet the surface of a boulder to better see the colour underneath the skin. They also use small metal plates and penlight. The plate is placed on the surface at a show point and a penlight shone through from the side furthest from the eye, which reveals colour in the absence of glare from the light (Hughes *et. al.* 2010: 8). I saw this technique used at the jade market in Mandalay, but not in China, where traders would simply place their flashlight directly against show points.

*River stones* are mostly recovered from alluvial deposits of the Uru River conglomerate, and usually occur as rounded stones, as the water has polished their edges. The skin of river stones is thus usually thinner than that of mountain stones, which makes it easier to infer their contents with a flashlight. A shop assistant in the Golden Star Company said river stones usually have better translucence and texture than mountain stones. Hughes *et al.* (2010: 10) describe how, especially when the river is high, men dive for jade in the river. Air is supplied via a crude air pump, akin to a bicycle hand pump. In Ruili, I saw river stones ranging from the size of an egg to that of a suitcase, and in weight from a few hundred grams to tens of kilos.

## Age

Also a separation between 'old mine' and 'new mine' stones affects valuation. Different observers distinguish old and new mine stones according to 1) historical time of their mining; 2) for how long time a mine has been worked; 3) geological age

of the stones; 4) perceptible properties of the stones; and 5) origin in either a mountain or river deposit. These diverse definitions point to a plurality, co-constitution and potential dissonance in elements that make up a valuation parameter for feicui.

A shop assistant in the Lucky Jewellery Company showed me a stone with a green colour called 'old green' (*lao lü se*), which she said only derives from old mines. She further said that old mine stones are more 'mature', which manifests in their colour being heavier and oilier. She described the difference between old and new mine stones as similar to that between old and young people. The analogy distinguished 'old' as harder, more settled and firm from 'young' as unfinished and porous, thereby concretising features of jade through a juxtaposition of features with analogical human manifestation. Another trader said more river stones than mountain stones are considered old mine, and that 'young' feicui is usually considered 'utility' and 'commercial' grade, while 'Imperial' grade feicui is considered 'old'.

## Skin

The most important skill in dealing with 'betting stones' (*dushi*), which are traded with their skin on, is to infer the stone's 'meat' (*rou*) from its 'skin' (*pifu*). Some traders graded skin in terms of thickness and hardness, and used the word *pike* ('hard outer shell') to characterise a thicker and harder surface crust in mountain stones. Another parameter for inferring meat from the skin of feicui stones is *mang* (literally 'python snake'), a patterned structure in the meat that manifests as a pattern on the skin. One trader characterised stones, in which the meat can be relatively unambiguously inferred from their skin, as 'stones with clear understanding' (*mingliao shitou*), as opposed to 'commodity with the head covered' (*mengtou huo*). Due to the restriction of valuation parameters, buying skin-covered stones is often referred to as 'gambling' (*dubo*), but buying a skin-covered stone and postponing its opening due to an expectation that its value will rise can also be considered 'speculation' (*chao zuo*).

'Windows' or 'doors' are techniques that facilitate valuation. To 'open a window' (*kai chuang*) or 'open a door' (*kai menzi*) is done by grinding off the surface skin of a stone at positions, where good quality feicui may be located beneath. This is also referred to a 'shaving open an entrance gate' (*cakou*). The difference in size between 'windows' and 'doors' shaved open in feicui is analogical to a difference in size

between a window and a door in a house. A 'window' in feicui is typically only a few centimetres, while a 'door' can be up to 20 centimetres wide.

The daughter of the owner of the Lucky Jewellery Company said she had practically no previous knowledge about feicui when her father opened the company in Ruili five years earlier, and has only learned about the content of different stones during the past three years of her working as the company's director. She has gained this knowledge by examining the skin of stones that have been cut open, which enables her to compare the relation between different types of skin and meat in feicui. She then applies this knowledge to unopened skin-covered betting stones. This form of qualified inference is instrumental in calculating prices that her company will offer for betting stones from other traders, and the prices they will demand for their own betting stones. Borrowing from the terminology of Saussure's ([1959] 2011) structural semiology, we can suggest that the skin of a feicui stone functions as a 'signifier' to its 'signified' meat, albeit inferences from skin to meat are rarely straightforward and demand knowledge through practical engagements with stones.

One jade trader in Shanghai explained that he always keeps a part of the skin on nephrite jade from Hetian in China's Xinjiang Province. The skin functions as a marker of authenticity, and a trader in Ruili explained that the skin of a stone is the only accurate indicator of particular mines, as similar types of meat can be found in stones from different mines. While jadeite mountain stones have thicker skin than jadeite river stones, the shop owner said that nephrite mountain stones do not have skin, and the patch of orange skin served to prove that his stones are river stones. His daughter told me that the Chinese government has made restrictions on how much nephrite jade can be mined from Hetian due to concerns that the mines are depleting, and that some traders are now marketing nephrite jade from Russia and China's Qinghai Province as nephrite jade from Hetian in the Xingjiang Province, because this source of origin indicates high-quality nephrite jade. She argued that while the jade features almost the same quality, nephrite jade from Russia and Qinghai is perhaps not a shiny as Hetian nephrite jade. She felt that traders are 'dishonest', when they claim a different source of origin for their jade than is actually the case. One of her friends bought a stone in Hetian, but when she came back to Shanghai and opened the stone, the colour inside was grey and thus not worth much. She thought that perhaps her friend had actually bought jade from Russia or Qinghai. In the case of nephrite jade, the reconfiguration of supply due to scarcity and mining in new locations thus create confusion and suspicions about the relation between source of origin, quality, and authenticity.

## Type

The most important valuation parameter for feicui is its 'type' (*zhong*). Type refers to texture, and is measured by degree of 'water' (*shui*) or 'dryness' (*gan*). Water characterises lustre, smoothness, transparency, and translucency, whereas dryness signifies a lack of these properties. Traders spray water on exposed meat of stones that have been cut or had a window opened to enhance its texture.

In Ruili, feicui is categorised into a wide variety of types and sub-types. While there is some variation in how different traders term feicui types, I found an overall consensus on the four highest graded feicui types and their sub-types on the basis of which I present a basic typology and hierarchy of value below.[71] This hierarchy can be extended with numerous more types, and it should be noted that the typology derives from traders, shop assistants, and company managers in Ruili, and might be different in other Chinese markets.

| **Type 1** | **Glass-type (boli zhong 璃种)** |
|---|---|
| Sub-type 1<br>Sub-type 2<br>Sub-type 3<br>Sub-type 4 | 'Dragon stone glass type' (longshi boli zhong 龙石玻璃种),<br>'Flower water glass type' (hua shui boli zhong 花水玻璃种)<br>'Agate glass type' (manao boli zhong 玛瑙玻璃种).<br>'Standard glass type' (yiban de boli zhong 一般的玻璃种) |
| **Type 2** | **Ice type (bing zhong 冰种)** |
| Sub-type 1<br>Sub-type 2 | 'High ice type' (gao bingzhong 高冰种)<br>'Ordinary ice type' (yiban de bingzhong 一般的冰种) |
| **Type 3** | **Grainy type (nuo zhong 糯种)** |
| Sub-type 1<br>Sub-type 2<br>Sub-type 3<br>Sub-type 4 | 'Delicate grainy type' (Xi nuo zhong 细糯种)<br>'Grainy ice type' (nuo bing zhong 糯冰种) / 'high grainy' (gao nuo 高糯).<br>'Grainy flower' (nuo hua 糯花)<br>'Ordinary grainy type' (nuo zhong 糯种) |
| **Type 4** | **Bean type (dou zhong 豆种)** |
| Sub-type 1<br>Sub-type 2 | 'Delicate bean type' (xi dou zhong 细豆种)<br>'Coarse bean type' (cu dou zhong 粗豆种) |

**23.** Hierarchy of value for the four highest valued types of feicui. Type 1 is the highest graded type.

[71] Terminological differences become more pronounced, when comparing jade nomenclature in Ruili with those of Chinese communities outside Mainland China. In the village of Doi Pui in Northern Thailand, one Yunnannese gem trader used the term feicui to refer to emeralds. In turn, he referred to jadeite interchangeably as 'jade stone' (*yushi* 玉石), 'gemstone' (*baoshi* 宝石) and 'green gemstone' (*lübao* 绿宝); the latter being a common term for emeralds in Ruili. His use of the term feicui for emeralds and of lübao for jadeite emphasises the importance of emerald-green colour as a determinant for both jadeite and emeralds, while his use of the term baoshi for jadeite is likely rooted in the historical use of baoshi as a generic term for gemstones imported from Burma to China (see Sun 2011).

Each generic type and sub-type is graded on the basis of the quality of its texture, often in correspondence with other valuation parameters. For example, 'dragon stone glass type' is thought to have a perfect match between colour and texture. Its texture is highly watery, and its colour even, smooth, and deeply saturated. Its base colour is green, and the analogy to the dragon signifies its rarity. It is said be hot on the skin in winter and cool in summer. Usually 'grainy type' is coarse like cereal or glutinous like sticky rice, but two shop assistants compared the 'delicate grainy type' (*xi nuo zhong*) to the lychee fruit to signify that its texture is finer and smoother than cereal and sticky rice. The shop assistants thus graded two sub-types of feicui through an analogy that juxtaposed the textures of common foodstuffs. They further analogised the texture of the 'agate glass type' feicui to a woman's skin, and characterised it as gentle, kind, mild, moist, smooth, and exquisite.

The nomenclature presented above shows how types and sub-types of feicui are often termed by employing words from a nonhuman world (water, glass, ice, grain, bean, cereal, sticky rice, lychee fruit, dragon, and so on), which are graded using binary adjectives (old // new, high // low, delicate // coarse, watery // dry), and made into compound words (dragon-stone-glass-type). In contrast to reducing properties of feicui to chemical microstructure, this way of naming expands the metaphorical potentials of the material.

Some traders in Ruili also consider 'ink jade' (*mo yu*) a sub-type of feicui, while gemmologists refer to the material as chloromelanite, which contains a large percentage of iron. Ink jade hosts a dark-to-black surface colour, but exposes a translucent green when penetrated by light. The manager of the 'Lucky Jewellery' Company further presented a type that she called 'dog shit type' (*gou shi di*). The surface of this type is not good, and it will usually contain a bad quality feicui, but if it features a green colour this will usually be a very high quality green colour. Both the ink type and the dog shit type exemplify how the relation between surface and substance in feicui can rarely be directly inferred.

The manager at the Many Gemstones Company used the expression 'the rarer the material, the more expensive it is' (*wu yi xi wei gui*) to describe how value increases with scarcity. Good quality glass-type feicui is very difficult to find, and consequently very expensive. For example, I was presented with a 20-grams green-coloured necklace pendant, carved as an S-shaped *ruyi* and set in a platinum frame encircled by diamonds, which cost 9.8 million *Yuan*. The shop assistants named this piece 'old mine dragon glass type gratification' (*laokeng boli zhong ruyi*), exemplifying how a compound word is constructed to describe properties of a piece of feicui by drawing

upon different valuation parameters. The different Chinese characters refer to mining (old mine), type (glass type) and carving (S-shape / gratification). The two characters for *ruyi* can mean two things: They can signify an S-shaped ornamental object, usually made of jade. They also mean 'to find something satisfactory or as one wishes', or 'to be gratified'. In this S-shaped *feicui* necklace pendant, material and symbolic meaning fuse into a material-concept that, somewhat similar to how Holbraad (2007) discusses divinatory Cuban *ache* powder as a particular form of materialised power, constitutes gratification materialised in feicui. The shop assistants said this type of jewellery is usually bought as an investment by two kinds of buyers. First, some famous actresses or singers will wear it for galas or special events. The second type of buyers is *tuhao* or *fu'erdai*. Tuhao is a derogatory term for China's new rich, which can also mean 'local tyrant'. Also carrying negative connotations, fu'erdai more specifically refers to children of entrepreneurs or government officials, who got rich after Deng Xiaopeng's economic reforms in the 1980s. Such expensive jewellery may be shown off at special occasions, but will otherwise be kept in a safety box at home or in the bank with the expectation that it will increase in value. It is usually not worn in everyday situations out of fear that it might be stolen.

## Colour

Feicui can feature different colours (*yanse*), including green, yellow, white, purple, blue, red, black, and colourless. Certain colours and colour combinations have different meanings, including luck, longevity, fortune, happiness, health, intelligence, success, death, and rebirth. Feicui colours are also often termed through analogies to both nonhuman and human phenomena. Finally, colour in feicui is evaluated within the grammar of more abstract binaries, including Taoist assumptions about balance and harmony as an ideal state, which are immanent in other things than jade, and cut across categories of human and nonhuman.

Variations in human perceptions of colours have featured in debates between 'universalists', who argue for conformity of human perceptual experience, implying that all people see and name colours in a somewhat consistent way, and 'relativists, who argue for a spectrum of experiences. The World Colour Survey, published in 2009, holds as a hypothesis that every culture has basic colour words for at least part of the rainbow, while anthropologist Alexandre Surrallés found that the Candoshi, a tribe living on the banks of the Amazon River, do not have a word for the concept of colour. Aided by missionaries, who showed 330 different colour chips to tribal people

throughout the world, representing 110 unwritten languages, The World Colour Survey concluded that the Candoshi had words for black, white, red, and yellow-orange. Meanwhile, Surrallés found that all these words actually referred to a specific thing, rather than a colour (see Jones 2017). Chinese certainly distinguish between colours. Yet, somewhat similar to Surrallés' argument for the Candoshi, some Chinese words for colours of jade and other gemstones can also refer to 'things', or nonhuman phenomena.[72] As we have seen, *fei* refers to green jade or to the Kingfisher bird, while *cui* can refer both to green jade, the Kingfisher bird, and to an emerald-green colour.

Overall, colours of jade in China can be evaluated according to a matrix with four binary concepts (figure 2): First, *zheng* means 'purity' and signifies proportion between main colour and sub-colour, where the main colour is sufficient. The opposite of zheng is *xie*, which can mean 'irregular'. As a paired concept *zhengxie* forms an opposition between 'vital energy' (*zhengqi*) and 'pathogeny' (*xieqi*), while zheng can also mean 'justice' or 'honesty' as opposed to xie, which can mean 'evil'. Secondly, *nong* means 'thick' or 'strong', and characterises the intensity and depths of colour in jade. The opposite of nong is *dan*, which means 'thin' or 'pale'. As a paired concept *nongdanshiyi* characterises a colour neither too deep, nor to pale. Thirdly, *yang* means the sun, and is related to heat and male energies. It signifies the light, warmth, and intensity of the colour, and *yang* usually designates a warm green colour. The opposite of yang is *yin*, which signifies the moon, cold, and female energies. Characterising colour, *yin* means the colour is too cold. The paired opposition of *yin-yang* is known as a symbol of holistic duality in Taoist philosophy. Fourthly, *yun* characterises 'evenness' of colour. It's opposite is *hua*; literally 'flowers', which appear as irregular colour spots or patterns.

| Positive properties | Negative properties | Opposition signifies |
|---|---|---|
| Zheng 正 ('purity', 'justice) | Xie 邪 ('irregular', 'evil') | Proportion between main colour and sub-colour. |
| Nong 浓 ('thick', 'strong') | Dan 淡 ('thin', 'feeble') | Intensity and depth of colour |
| Yang 阳 (sun, male, warm) | Yin 阴 (moon, female, cold) | Light and warmth of colour |
| Yun 匀 (evenness) | Hua 花 (uneven, 'flowers') | Evenness of colour |

**24.** Paired oppositions signifying colour in jade.

[72] Sun Laichen (2001: 205-206) refers to the earliest account of the Qing-Burmese gem trade, written by Liu Kun in 1680, which provides a terminology of gemstones. Some examples from this terminology demonstrate how colours can refer to nonhuman phenomena: Red-coloured stones are called 'rose-water' (*meigui shui*), 'pigeon-blood' (*gezi xie*), and 'garnet color' (shiliu hong). Some white stones are called 'cat's eys' (*maoeryan*), some are called *tan yangjing* (literally 'color of goat semen'), and others *jiuhuang fen* (literally 'colour of powder of yellow Chinese chives').

These four valuation parameters for colour – proportion, intensity, warmth, and evenness – apply to each colour. The highest valued colour of feicui is a pure, thick, warm, even green with a tint of yellow, often referred to as 'Imperial Green' (*diwang lü*). Cabochons with Imperial Green are usually set in gold rings, which enhance the yellowish tint. Shop assistants at the Golden Star Company said that strong-coloured shiny green is too 'raw' for young people and should be worn by people over 40 years old, thus conceptually matching colour intensity of feicui with human age. One trader also pointed to regional taste differences, and said people from Thailand, Guangdong, and Shanghai prefer dark green colour in feicui, while Yunnanese prefer the yellowish tint of Imperial Green feicui.

One type of yellow-green colour is likened to the mature leaves of the poplar tree (*yangshu*). The meaning of poplar is integrity. Only the mature leaves are thick in greenness, and do not lack yellow flavour. A different yellow-green, which is considered fresher and more youthful, is called *nen*; a character that can both describe 'tender' meat and the 'delicate' skin of infants. 'Spring colour' (*chunse*) characterises pink jade, violet or 'purple colour flower' (*ziluolanhua*) also refers to the flower *Matthiola incana*, while the best purple is called 'aubergine colour' (*quezi de yanse*). It is said to be a picky colour, because only certain people look good with purple. Some feicui stones host a 'belt' of colour, referred to as a 'snake belt' (*shedai*). 'Pretty colour' (*qiao se*) refers to a stone with different colours. The word *qiao* can refer to a pretty, playful, and youngish woman, or be a flattering or teasing way to address an elderly woman. These examples demonstrate how colours in feicui are concretised through analogies both to nonhuman species like leaves, flowers, aubergine, and snake, and to human domains, as in the case of a delicate skin of infants or a pretty, playful, young woman.

The four binaries used to evaluate colours in jade – justice // evil; strong // feeble; male // female; and even // uneven - manifest ontological assumptions about a dualist dynamics that is potentially inherent in all things. Descola (2013b) relates Francois Jullien's (1989) discussion of how the things of the world are engendered in the works of the 17th Century Chinese neo-Confucian scholar Wang Fuzhi. Here, reality can be conceived as a continuous process resulting from the interaction of two principles, neither of which is more fundamental than the other; for example *yin* and *yang*: "From this stems a logic of a mutual relationship with no beginning and no end that excludes any external founding agent […] and any reference to some transcendent "otherness"" (Descola: 322-323). Order is thus inherent in the nature of things and

stems from their continuous development (ibid: 323). Invoking these dualisms in jade seems to invoke a dynamic balance that exists in all beings and cuts through domains like human and nonhuman.

**25.** (Left). Hue and saturation of green in jadeite © Richard Hughes. (Right). The highest colour in feicui is 'Imperial Green' which hosts a tint of yellow.

## Transparency

Referring to texture of feicui, 'water' also signifies its transparency. Water is often graded into 'good' or 'long' water (*shuihao / shuichang*) versus 'short' or 'dry' water (*duan shui / gan shui*). 'Dragon full of water' (*long dao chu you shui*) signifies green-coloured feicui with a good texture and high transparency. 'Horse teeth stone' (*ma ya shi*) conversely characterises a certain type of stone with low transparency and grainy texture, similar to that of a tooth. The plural valuation parameters employed in terming these types exemplify how qualities of singular goods are interdependent (Dekker 2016: 109). Both 'dragon full of water' and 'horse teeth stone' function as 'exemplary goods', which "allow us to interpret new goods that come on to the market" (ibid.). The 'dragon full of water' is "close to some ideal and thus far from the typical" (ibid: 108), while the 'horse tooth stone' is more typical, and functions as what we might call a 'counter-exemplar' in manifesting how feicui should *not* ideally look.

### Inclusions

Inclusions are often referred to as 'cotton' (*mian*), and generally decrease the value of feicui. The shape of an inclusion can appear as a 'part'; a 'stripe'; a 'thread'; or as 'waves'. Inclusions can often be observed directly with the eyes, and can indicate authenticity of feicui. Stones with low transparency should have inclusions, so if a stone features low transparency and no inclusions, it is likely counterfeit. Only high quality, transparent types occur naturally without inclusions.

## Jade-Women Analogies

By now, we should have gained a sense of how jade traders in Ruili signify properties of feicui through analogies to other nonhuman phenomena and to features of humans. Feicui, in turn, can also signify humans. Below, I relate how some male Chinese feicui traders analogised an eroticised ethnic hierarchy of value for women with the hierarchy of value for feicui.

The Chinese word *baobei* (treasure, precious) can refer both to jade and to one's sweetheart, and jade (*yu*) often evokes a notion of feminine beauty and is a common female name in China.[73] During a car ride with Mr Liu and his gang from the Palatial Hotel, Liu pointed at some Burmese women and asked me "Do you like this type? This is ink jade [*mo yu*]. We Chinese like white jade [*bai yu*; white nephrite], but I heard you Westerners like women with black skin". Liu here analogised the skin-tone of the Burmese women with feicui types of different colour. The black-surfaced ink jade is an expensive feicui type, which Liu himself buys in Mandalay and sells in Ruili. Similarly to how Burmese feicui is an available and valuable commodity for wealthy Chinese jade traders, Liu and his friends described Burmese women as sexually available. While married to a Han Chinese woman from his native Hunan province, Liu showed me pictures of a Burmese 'girlfriend', whom he visits on his jade purchasing trips to Mandalay. Also, on two occasions, we went to a water reservoir to swim, and Liu brought along two different Burmese women, whom he likewise referred to as his girlfriends. But for Liu, Burmese ink jade is culturally less valuable than the white-coloured nephrite jade mined in China's Xinjiang Province. Liu thus concretised an ethnified hierarchy, in which 'white-skinned' Chinese women

[73] To mention just one example from Chinese literature, Chinese author Jia Pingwa (1996: 92) in his novel *Heavenly Rain* relates how villagers had heard the wife of an urban magistrate newcomer to their village "praised as being as flawless as the purest jade and as graceful as the celestials".

are more attractive and 'black-skinned' Burmese women less attractive, but more sexually available, through an analogy to a hierarchy, in which white domestic Chinese nephrite is more valuable than black Burmese feicui. Embedded in this hierarchy is a hierarchical distinction between wives and girlfriends. In Chapter 5, I noted how men express greater obligations to wives than to girlfriends. Considered members of the family and household (*yi jia ren*), wives comprise a 'we-relation' to men that girlfriends, who are more associated with pleasure and 'face', do not.

In order to understand analogies between ethnified value hierarchies of women and jade, we may consider Descola's (2013b) proposition of a 'general schema' of analogising that does not take a distinction between human and nonhuman as its point of departure. Descola suggests "it is neither a matter of projecting relations between humans upon relations to nonhumans nor one of extending to humans the attitude adopted toward nonhumans. Rather, homologous guiding principles apply in relations with two groups of beings that are hard to dissociate from the point of view of the types of behaviour that they provoke" (ibid: 107). Mr Liu's analogy between women and jade likewise seems underpinned by a more foundational analogy that separates both nonhuman and human into more basic categories of 'us' and 'them'. The basic distinction made by Mr Liu is arguably not between jade and humans, but between a 'we-assemblage' that comprises white-skinned Han Chinese (potential) wives, and domestically mined white jade, and a 'they-assemblage' that comprises dark-skinned Burmese (potential) girlfriends, and Burmese black jade. Descola sees this type of 'identification' as a universal fact in all societies: "it is safe to accept as a universal fact the form of individuation that an indexical consciousness of the self renders manifest and that is reinforced by the intersubjective differentiation that stems from the use of "you"" (ibid: 118). A student of Lévi-Strauss, Descola is thus not the typical postmodern cultural relativist in the sense that he subsumes a relativizing of distinctions between nonhuman and human under the claim of a universal human disposition to distinguish between interior and exterior, between 'us' and 'them', and Kapferer (2014) labels Descola's project 'neostructuralism' due to its combination of anti-anthropocentric and universal structural claims (see also Lambek 2014).

During a dinner with six elite jade traders in Ruili, one trader, a middle-aged local Yunnannese man, exclaimed that he was looking for a girlfriend. The other traders discussed whether he should go for a Dai or Jingpo – that is, ethnic minority – or a Han Chinese woman. The consensus was that a young, fair-skinned Han Chinese woman was the best choice, and one of the traders said that a man of his status should

have a Han Chinese 'glass type jade' girlfriend, because he would be seen with her in town, implying that the girlfriend should give him 'face'. Like Mr Liu, this trader analogised an eroticised ethnic hierarchy of value for women with a vernacular hierarchy of value for feicui by signifying the superior status of a fair-skinned Han Chinese woman as 'glass-type jade', as opposed to the lower valued 'type' of local ethnic women.

## Nature-Culture, Analogies, and Prototypes

This chapter has explored a relation between mineralogical properties of feicui and human languages, concepts, and valuation parameters. Rather than privileging 'culture' in the form of human evaluations as a signifier on the basis of which feicui as a manifestation of 'nature' is signified, I have pointed to how value is determined through contingencies between the two domains.

On the one hand, I have argued that the singularity of feicui complicates the establishment of an unambiguous single valuation scale, thus emphasising that intrinsic properties of things may condition cultural conceptions. On the other hand, I have examined how a 'scientific' and a 'vernacular' language employ different logics in determining and valuing feicui. Whereas the scientific language of gemmology employs mutual exclusion and reduction in determining jadeite as a mineral entity, a vernacular Chinese nomenclature signifies feicui pieces by making analogies to nonhuman and human phenomena, thereby establishing differences and similarities that underpin hierarchies of value. I have suggested that if the scientific language strives towards unambiguous terms for phenomena seen as reducible into entities, the vernacular Chinese nomenclature exposes a flexibility of terms that seizes upon commercial potentials of jade, and conceptualises phenomena as relational and co-constitutive. Below, I expand upon these dialectics between 'nature' and 'culture' and between 'singularity' and 'commensurability' in valuation of feicui.

First, I reiterate that some valuation parameters partially derive from intrinsic properties of jade, which direct human uses of the material. In Chapter 1, I presented Ming Yu's (2009: 13-14) distinction between Ritual, Hierarchy, Funerary, Ornamental, Utilitarian, and Decorative jades. To these, we can add perceived properties of jade as a means of protection and curing ailments, as well as its economic roles as stores of financial value, media of special exchanges (wedding gift, inheritance, bribes), and as means to move assets (Naylor 2010: 132). In Neolithic

uses of jade as a tool, its hardness and toughness was key (Demattè 2006: 209). But at the same time its susceptibility to carving is also defining. Meanwhile, the dominant contemporary use of feicui as jewellery adds significance to its texture, colour, and transparency. The material properties of feicui also matter for the use of jade as a store of value, medium of exchanges, and means to move assets, as a high economic value can be held in a small feicui piece, as compared to assets like real estate. Rather than exclusively seeing feicui as valued within *à priori* existing semantic grammars, we must thus consider how valuation parameters are 'afforded' by its material properties (see Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009: 21-22).

Secondly, however, the economic value of feicui is obviously not detachable from human worlds. In Graeber's (2001) structuralist analysis, value equals meaning as established through human contrastive classifications, and we have seen, for example, how Ruili's traders grade feicui colour within a conceptual system of binary oppositions. In the opening quote of this chapter, Descola (2013b: 206) sees in Chinese philosophy "what appears to be a central feature of any analogical ontology, namely the difficulty of distinguishing in practice among the components of existing beings, between that which stems from interiority and that which stems from physicality". Here, 'interiority' is characterises includes "what we generally call the mind, the soul, or consciousness: intentionality, subjectivity, reflexivity, feelings, and the ability to express oneself and to dream" (ibid: 116). 'Physicality' concerns external form, substance, and the physiological. It is "the whole set of visible and tangible expressions of the dispositions peculiar to a particular entity when those dispositions are reputed to result from morphological and physiological characteristics that are intrinsic to it" (ibid.). Descola's concept of 'identification' presupposes a universal claim that "every human perceives himself or herself as a unit that is a mixture of interiority and physicality" (ibid: 116).[74]

In China, 'interior' forces like *qi* ('life energy') seem at times to conflate with the 'physicality' of feicui jewellery worn to the human skin through processes of absorbing and transmitting (see Chapter 8). Descola characterises Modern Western societies as 'naturalist' in the sense that we see nature or physicality as universally fixed, but culture or interiority as variable. In turn, he describes traditional Chinese culture as 'analogist', because it gives play to infinite variability in both interiority and

[74] Michael Lambek (2014: 413) argues that Descola does not discard a distinction between nature and culture, but goes 'beyond' it by replacing it with two binary oppositions - "a substantive one between physicality and interiority, and a logical one between similarity and difference". Lambek does not find nature//culture dualism and Descola's model of four ontological modes mutually exclusive, but sees them as different levels of abstraction (ibid).

physicality (see also Kipnis 2017). In Descola's analytical scheme, the characteristic feature of feicui would not an essential difference from humans, but rather a potential – inseparable from its materiality - for stimulating a range of analogies; to animals, plants, and colours, between nonhuman and human, and between self and the Other. Conceptual binaries manifest in valuation parameters for feicui - such as yin//yang; hot//cold; old//young; hard//soft; strong//feeble; wet//dry - are immanent not only in jade, but ideally underpin all existing beings in a balance, and thus cut across domains that have been separated in Modern Western naturalism, including interiority and physicality, culture and nature.

However, the vernacular Chinese analogical ontology and the Western naturalist ontology I have sketched out should not be seen as static theories about the world, and the distinction between them is not rigid and clear-cut. For example, Chinese beliefs in medicinal properties of jade are not as exotic as we might like to think, and I have noted similar beliefs in Western 'New Age' tought. Also, in the Baltic Sea region, amber oil has been used as a cure for ailments – spanning plague, cholera, stomach-ache, urination problems, heart problems, cramps, tapeworm, neurotic disorder, apoplexy, paralysis, blindness, nausea, abscess, gangrene, and pneumonia - well up in 20$^{th}$ century, and is still used in Western medicaments to treat arthritis and epilepsy today (Faber, Frandsen and Ploug 2000: 98-100). 'Our' separation of gemstones as belonging to a 'natural' domain clearly distinct and mutually exclusive to that of humans seems more idealistic than practical. Different ontological assumptions and their methods of identification may co-exist in Ruili's feicui markets, as both sight, sound, and touch *and* gemmological methods are used for identifying feicui.

If conceptual oppositions inherent in jade and analogies linking jade to other nonhuman and human phenomena are ways to establish ontological order by rendering singularities commensurable, then the establishment of 'exemplars' and 'prototypes' serve a similar purpose. As certain properties of feicui come to be valued higher than others, certain stones are sought for at mines and brought to markets, which, in the manner of a feedback process, guide a crystallisation of consumer demand. This process can also be conceptualised with my discussion of the 'filter'. While materials conforming to the crystallised cultural taste pass through the conceptual filter, others are filtered out. The categories of 'B-quality jade' and 'by-product jade' exemplify this process well. While not conforming to the requirements of high-price markets, these materials have their own uses and markets. Dekker (2016: 116) discusses how 'exemplars' function as 'focal points', and "the new goods are positioned in relation to these focal points, and so the quality uncertainty […] is

reduced". The 'exemplar' exposes some affinity with Gell's (1998) concept of 'prototypes', which are "entities held, by abduction, to be represented in the index", where indexes are "material entities which motivate abductive inferences and cognitive interpretations" (ibid: 27). In feicui carved as Buddhas, the carving is an index and the Buddha a prototype. Dekker's 'exemplar' is also reminiscent of Rosch's (1973, 1978) discussion of the 'prototype' that condenses groups of particular cases displaying a 'family resemblance' into a network of associated representations. 'Classificatory concepts' embedded in prototypes are "based on fragments of tacit knowledge relating to the properties that our theoretical and practical knowledge of the world leads us to ascribe to the objects to which those concepts refer" (in Descola 2013b: 99).

Each piece of feicui is unique. Through a discussion of how mineralogical properties of feicui in their visual and tactile manifestations interplay with ontological assumptions and categorisations, this chapter has demonstrated how Chinese jade traders mobilise a plethora of terms and valuation parameters to capture this diversity. But still, Ruli's professional jade traders express a tacit knowledge of how feicui should ideally look: Watery texture, emerald-green colour, high translucency and transparency and with few inclusions. Such a piece of feicui guides price formation in Chinese feicui markets as an exemplar, or prototype, against which other pieces are evaluated.

# 8. Potential: Indeterminacy and Determination

> Stone is primal matter, inhuman in its duration. Yet despite its incalculable temporality, the lithic is not some vast and alien outside. A limit-breaching intimacy persistently unfolds. Hurl a rock and you'll shatter an ontology, leave taxonomy in glistening shards.
>
> — Jeffrey Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*.

While the previous chapter discussed interplays between mineralogical properties and ontological assumptions in *how* feicui is valued, this chapter asks *why* is feicui so highly valued in China. Jade traders and carvers in Ruili commonly answered this question with the popular Chinese proverb, "people cultivate jade, and jade cultivates people" (*ren yang yu, yu yang ren*). Such human-jade cultivations can be aesthetic in the sense that the natural beauty of especially women is enhanced by jade jewellery. They can also manifest as perceptible changes in jade and corporeal effects in humans following their physical interaction, or comprise a human striving towards moral and spiritual ideals thought to be manifested in jade. While jade in China's contemporary market economy is charged with unprecedented economic potentials in terms of sales prices and volumes, the material also for some seems to charge a moral and spiritual deficiency related to commoditization and social flux. This chapter discusses how carvers, traders and consumers interact with feicui to realize different potentials. I conceptualise this realization of potentials as a process of determining the indeterminate, and point to an interactive mutual conditioning of humans and jade.

While emptiness can characterize a lack of content in a domain, or a depletion of internal content that is replaced or transformed by external content or forces, indeterminacy here designates a state, where meanings, qualities, and values of a phenomenon have not yet been fixed, or determined. Diverging from an epistemological prioritising of human interpretations and meanings as separable from the beings of material things (see Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007), the chapter

demonstrates how its material properties contribute in constituting feicui as partially indeterminate. This partial indeterminacy, in turn, fosters intimate human interactions with feicui in order to determine it, and realize its potentials.

The indeterminacy-determination binary to some extent resonates with the Chinese binary of *xu* and *shi*, which can mean empty and full, respectively. Whereas *xu* is posited as depletion in some Chinese perceptions of health (Bunkenborg 2009, 2017), it can also indicate openness and opportunities. A woman in Ruili recounted the following legend: A villager asked Kongzi why people came to see him in the village. Kongzi answered, "They come here to study *Tao* [the way]." The villager said, "Tao is xu. There are many other things shi, which are more important." Kongzi responded, "You see this house, if it is full of things, do you think it is still useful? It is useful, because it is xu."[75] The lesson of the story is that xu, understood as emptiness, preconditions and facilitates shi as a filling up of the house with things and people. Here, xu designates emptiness as an indeterminate potential that can be realized and determined as shi in different ways, and the chapter discusses indeterminacy and determination of feicui in this sense.

On the one hand, some traders and carvers embrace the partial indeterminacy of feicui stones as an opportunity for making a good deal by making inferences about its internal substance from its surface properties or submitting themselves to forces of luck, and some express a fascination with the indeterminacy of skin-covered feicui stones as potentials kept open. On the other hand, some informants explain how feicui guides their interactions both with the material itself and with other people, constitutes spiritual fullness and an ideal for self-cultivation in a changing society, and can accumulate and transmit properties and effects into their bodies and their social and spiritual lives.

Encompassing dualisms that are often posited as mutually constitutive, feicui may thus appear simultaneously as both an empty, passive, and indeterminate container, which invites human investments of labour, meaning, and value, and as a determined, stimulating agent that actively interacts with, conditions, and co-constitutes humans. The chapter argues that certain Chinese human-jade interactions through processes of absorbing, shielding, transmitting, and stimulating affords us a conceptualisation of humans and jade in China as distinct, but unbounded and mutually constitutive entities.

[75] While Taoism comprises several philosophical and religious branches, Tao generally connotes notions of 'nothing' and 'non-doing' in Chinese thought (see e.g. Fung [1948] 1976: 3, 110, 163, 221).

The chapter employs Graeber's (2001) notion of value as potentials realized within larger systems of differences and Lévi-Strauss' (1962) discussion of contrastive classifications of natural phenomena in conceptualizing how feicui is determined and concretises domains in human worlds. But whereas both Graeber and Lévi-Strauss ultimately situate value and meanings in human worlds, I pay particular attention to how the materiality of feicui may condition both its own determination (or lack thereof) and the symbolic and corporeal worlds of people interacting with it. Employing a structuralist analysis of how interactions between humans and jade concretise both as mutually receptive and agentive entities in China, the discussion further draws upon approaches that relativize a rigid dualism between human and nonhuman, and point to an anthropology that renounces to 'a great part of its anthropocentrism' (Descola 2013a: 5).

## Indeterminacy, Knowledge, and Flexibility

We remember that the generic term jade (*yu*) in China can refer to two chemically distinct stones, namely jadeite and nephrite. Many of my informants in Ruili refer to nephrite as *ruanyu* ('soft jade'). The material properties of feicui distinguish it from the cheaper *ruanyu.* Feicui is harder, has a higher acoustic pitch, and in most cases features a higher lustre, transparency, and translucency than ruanyu. Feicui furthermore hosts a potential discordance between surface and substance, which is not equally present in *ruanyu*. An opaque layer of 1-50 millimetres thick 'skin' that does not contain jadeite covers feicui stones, and carvers and traders thus cannot positively know what kind of 'meat' hides beneath their skin. This partial indeterminacy renders feicui stones particularly suitable for economic gambling and spiritual investments. The necessity of inferring substance from the surface of feicui stones further instils reliance on personal evaluation skills, rather than on institutions, as guarantors of authenticity, quality, and value.

Carvers and traders must develop personal knowledge about the material properties (*wuxing*) of feicui through tactile engagements with the material. Underpinning Chinese craftsmanship, knowledge about *wuxing* can be described as rooted in "human being's innate understanding and sensual experience of a natural substance" (Xu 2013: 158). It constitutes a "practical knowledge" that emerges in human tactile engagements with the natural environment, and contrasts more formal, deductive, epistemic knowledge associated with state conditioning of natural resources as

commodities (Scott 1998: 309-342), and, more generally, the isolation of 'nature' as a separate "field of inquiry from which to draw positive knowledge" (Descola 2013b: 28). In Chinese craft, such knowledge has typically been transmitted through apprenticeship as including and excluding "communities of practices" (Gowlland 2012). Partly oral, it has often been associated with secrecy (Eyferth 2009: 188-192).

The challenge of inferring substance from surfaces might be seen as a basic condition in late-socialist Chinese society, which some describe as abundant with potentially deceiving surfaces. Party-state discourse is sometimes experienced as "empty words" (Sybrandt 2017), while concerns deriving from an abundance of counterfeit goods and not always sincere vendors in Chinese markets have been discussed as a "value anxiety" (Brandtstädter 2009) and "authenticity anxiety" (Notar 2006b). Ethnographies from other postsocialist settings have discussed how moral critiques can take the form of indexical homologies between the surfaces of certain materials and the substance of particular groups of people (Humphrey 2002: 175-202; Lemon 1998; Pedersen 2004). In Ruili, Han Chinese people often associate Burmese street vendors with counterfeit feicui, while some buyers suspect even certificates of authenticity of being inauthentic. The material properties of feicui and the ways in which it is traded in Ruili's multi-ethnic markets thus combine with wider suspicions in China about a lack of interior value, quality, and authenticity of both objects, people, and official representations, and the absence of a detached way of determining them, in activating heightened sensibilities to relations between surface and substance.

Such sensibilities to surface-substance relations operate on different levels in the Sino-Myanmar jade trade. We have seen how dealing with officialdom, business partners and adversaries in sometimes opaque legal, and ethnic-political environments demands risk-taking, flexibility, and attentiveness to forms on the part of traders. Also, not being able to properly infer ulterior motives of people could, as the Rohingya jade trader Hamid experienced, have grave consequences. Emphasizing an ethos of risk-taking and gambling among Yunnannese underground jade traders in Burma during the socialist period (1962-1998), Chang (2011: 471) parallels the uncertainty of the Burmese situation with "the indeterminacy of the quality of jade stones that compounded the risk of the trade." Likewise in Ruili today feicui traders adopt risk-taking, flexibility and a heightened attention to appearances as orientations both in their relations with clients, partners and adversaries, and in their dealings with feicui stones.

## Surface and Substance

After arriving in Ruili, a feicui stone usually undergoes a series of material processes, which gradually expose the substance hidden beneath its surface. This progressive material determination of feicui consequently increases or decreases its economic value. Meanwhile, some prefer to maintain its indeterminacy, to keep its potentials open.

Carvers and traders employ different methods in assessing the substance of skin-covered feicui stones. They carefully examine the surface of the stone, and sometimes hit it with a hammer to evaluate its sound. Finally, they shine a light on the skin with a flashlight. If there is feicui just underneath the skin, its colour will shine through, hence revealing that there is feicui inside, but not the quantity. However, due to the aggregate structure of jadeite, the colour will be diffused from throughout the boulder by the scattering of light, so that even a small spot of rich colour can give the impression that the whole boulder is full of feicui (Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 12). Even if no colour and translucence is found by using the flashlight, there may still be feicui deeper inside the stone.

Depending on the colour and texture of its skin, a skilled trader will know which 'type' (*zhong*) a feicui stone is, and sometimes from which particular mine it derives. In the previous chapter, we saw how traders distinguish between 'old mine' (*lao keng*) and 'new mine' (*xin keng*), which can refer to how long a particular mine has been worked. Some traders say that stones from old mines are easier to evaluate, because they are more similar and have circulated for a longer time in the market. Appearances are often more deceptive in stones from new mines. One trader described such stones as *gao yao*, a 'plaster', which hides what is underneath.

Some traders specialize in skin-covered stones, which are referred to as 'betting stones' (*dushi*). One trader referred to trade in stones with windows as 'overt gambling' and trade in skin-covered stones as 'covert gambling'. Trading betting stones poses high economic opportunities and risks, because their skin hides their substance. For many traders, this indeterminacy constitutes a primary attraction of trading feicui. Echoing similar statements by other traders in Ruili, one trader explained:

> You can see the signs on the skin. You have to evaluate the skin. You can become broke or become a millionaire overnight. This is the charm of jade. It's even difficult for God to know its value. Even with scientific development, it's impossible to know

> the value inside jade. That's the secret of jade. The appearance is not always what it seems.

In Geertz's (1963) "bazaar-type economy", the crucial factor for traders is to know more about the commodity traded and its market than their transaction opponents, and to maintain the relative exclusivity of that knowledge. The indeterminacy of feicui opens up a space of individual agency and entitlement, where skills of inferring substance from surfaces translate as competitive advantages in the market, and commands respect within the jade trade community. Mr Huang, the local government official and gemstone company owner, thus takes pride in his nickname 'evil eyes' (*duyan*) which designates his alleged ability to see through the skin of feicui stones.

If a feicui ore is found in a stone, its owner may open a 'Heavenly Window (*tianchuang*) by grinding off the skin in a small area, allowing prospective buyers to assess the quality of feicui in the ore with their flashlight. This practice is not new. An account from 1836, cited by Levy and Scott-Clark (2001: 78), describes how a Kachin warlord controlled the mines, but refused entry to all foreigners and let Shan and Chinese traders wait in Mogaung for boulders to be dragged out of the valley by elephants, floated down the river on bamboo rafts and auctioned on the bank: "Before a sale, a thin slice was shaved from the surface of each rock, creating a small window to which the Chinese merchants would hold a candle in an attempt to glimpse what lay inside […] Then the haggling would begin" (see also Walker 1991: 24).[76] Opening a window may significantly increase or decrease the value of a betting stone. A trader told me he bought a stone for 120.000 *Yuan*, and opened a window only to find bad quality feicui inside. Someone offered him 20.000 *Yuan*, but he refused the offer, and instead opened another window, which reduced the next offer to 12.000 *Yuan*.

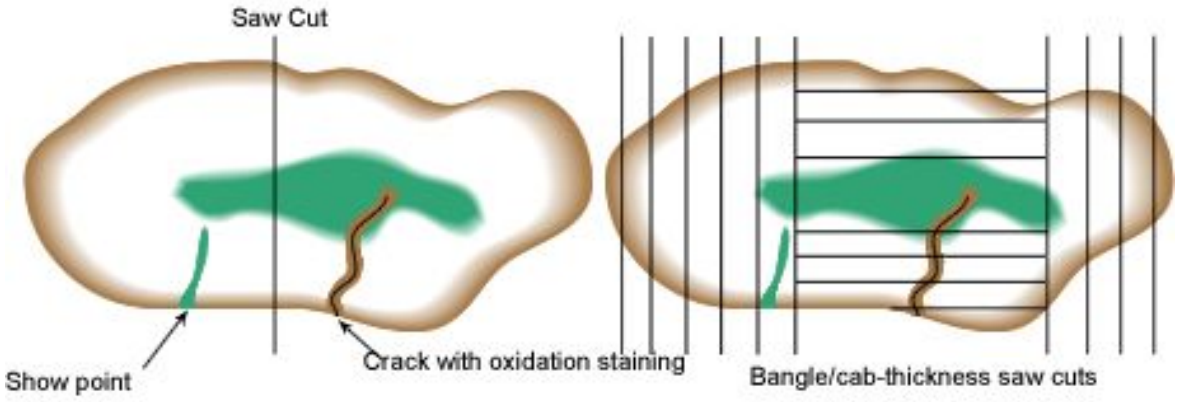
[76] In 1934, H.L. Chhibber likewise reported how sometimes "before a boulder of jade is sold, if it is promising, certain portions are polished to expose clearly to view the more valuable parts of the stone. Generally a small rectangular strip is ground and polished. This grinding is done by means of an emery disc, and then the exposed portions are polished with fine emery discs" (Chhibber 1934, in Hughes *et. al.* n.d.).

**26.** Light is flashed through a window in the skin of a feicui stone, revealing glass-type feicui. Photo by the author.

Cutting (*qie*) a feicui stone is a major step in revealing its substance, and all professional traders have stories about economic losses or gains related to this process. The placement of the cut is essential, as it comprises a risk of cutting straight through a feicui ore, which will minimize its economic value. One trader in Yinjiang advised me: "Never cut the jade until you are a master. Only the master will recognize the feicui inside. To become a feicui master can take all your life to learn." His uncle once did an extremely profitable deal. At Myanmar gem emporium, an eight-ton stone, which had been cut in two halves, was for sale for three consecutive years, but no one bought it, because the cut revealed a poor quality material inside. But when his uncle examined the skin very carefully, he saw something and bought the stone for 500.000 *Yuan.* After cutting it several times, he found high quality feicui inside. He sold the stone for 60 million *Yuan*, and invested some of the money in a nightclub in Yinjiang. Mr Huang showed me a cut stone with black skin and green meat at display the Prosperous Jade Company. He said that a tourist had bought the stone in Ruili for 90 *Yuan* and stroke upon luck, when he opened it and found a full green colour inside. Huang bought the stone from the tourist for 40.000 *Yuan*, and he was now selling it for 100.000 *Yuan*. Jack, my Kachin informant in Myitkina, used to invest in

betting stones, but stopped after he bought a stone full of cracks inside and lost a lot of money. "You never know what's inside", he said, "you have to study and do the trade for at least five years before you can really start investing in stones".

Such stories about gains and losses in the feicui market emphasize personal evaluation skills, as well as luck, risk-taking and economic agency. Traders must be at the right place at the right time, and have the courage and ability to invest substantial sums of money in a potentially empty stone.




**27.** 'Windows' are opened at jadeite veins. A centre cut (left) risk cutting through jadeite. Another method (right image) is to make shallow cuts the size of a bangle from all sides until jadeite is isolated. © Richard Hughes

The final process is the carving and polishing of the stone. Also for the master carver Wang Chaoyang, the charm of feicui is the tension it hosts between surface and substance. Stones without this tension can be controlled, but when carving feicui you have to immerse yourself into the stone, and let it guide you. Wang explained:

> In ruanyu, the surface and the inside are the same. There will not be any surprises. But with feicui, you have to read the stone, to feel the stone. Then you have an idea, but when you start to carve it, you always find surprises inside the stone. So you have to follow the stone, the stone leads you somewhere. That's the charm of feicui carving.

In Wang's explanation, feicui appears both indeterminate in the sense of hiding its substance, and determined in guiding its carver. Indeterminacy can indicate opportunities kept open. Wang has kept certain skin-covered stones for years. He is reluctant to carve them, because this will expose their substance. We likewise remember the 6-tonnes feicui boulder that was sold for 600 million *Yuan* by the Many Gemstones Company to an investor, who would allegedly exhibit it unopened,

and thus indeterminate, in his company in Shanghai. A recent trend among buyers to wear raw, skin-covered feicui pebbles as necklace pendants indicates a similar fascination with the indeterminacy of the material that resonates with the potentials of xu in Taoism, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter. When prices for Puer tea crashed in 2007 after the temperature of 'stir-roasting' the market had become too high, there were calls for more 'scientific' regulation that involved 'digitised' control of production and quantitative and standardised methods for determining authentic and counterfeit Puer tea. But such calls for standardisation and clear determination of authenticity were met by oppositional voices that argued for a return to the original *vague*, or 'raw', situation, leading (Zhang 2014: 119) to wonder "whether vagueness itself was a prerequisite for Puer tea in the cultural and social context of China".

## Hammer and Spectroscopy

For inexperienced buyers like tourists, authenticating and valuing feicui usually involves other people or institutions. Clifford Geertz (1963) discussed how the 'bazaar-type economy' is characterised by a 'sliding price system' of bargaining, "in which the primary competitive stress is not between seller and seller, as it is for the most part in a firm economy, but between buyer and seller (ibid: 33). The bargaining, sliding price system "tends to focus all the trader's attention on the individual two-person transaction: the aim is always to get as much as possible out of the deal immediately at hand" (ibid: 35). In Ruili's jade bazaars, 'competitive stress' was between buyer and seller, and nobody bought feicui without bargaining. One trader said that bargaining of feicui prices is like 'psychological warfare', and (Darke and Dahl 2003) note how receiving a discount can provide a psychological value for buyers. In an opague market of singular materials without standardized prices, where sellers would say almost anything to raise prices, the problem for buyers was how to establish a good bargain and who to trust to authenticate their bargain. Meanwhile, as experienced operators in the bazaar-type economy, Ruili's professional feicui traders use expressions like "the stone doesn't cheat people, but people cheat people", and "never trust the seller, only trust the stone". Juxtaposing honest stones with dishonest vendors, they emphasize the necessity of personal tactile engagements with feicui in determining its authenticity, quality, and value. Both types of authenticating

strategies accentuate concerns in Chinese markets and society about who and what can be trusted under which conditions.

As compared to the moral and legal effects of intellectual property rights in Western capitalism, scholars have pointed to a more pragmatic and flexible approach to creation in China, which includes a positively valued cultural tradition of copying rooted in Confucian ideals of imitation, Buddhist ideals of reiteration and a socialist idealist ethics of collective ownership of intellectual products (Alford 1995; Han 2011). But the introduction of market economy made intellectual ownership pertinent, and pervasive counterfeiting across product categories in contemporary China has intensified concerns that the surfaces of goods may conceal an internal lack of authenticity, quality, and value. As previously noted, feicui is also counterfeited in China, and jade has more simulants than most other gems (Walker 1991: 41). In gemmological terms, jade simulants are "those natural gem minerals and glass or plastic substitutes that appear to have some of the same visual characteristics as jade, but that lack jade's unique optical, physical and chemical properties" (ibid: 28). There are around 30 gem materials that can be used as jade simulants and around ten of these are regularly seen in the jewellery trade (ibid.).[77]

Traders distinguish between A, B, C, and D-quality feicui roughly as follows: A-quality is considered natural feicui, which is untreated or subjected to colourless wax polishing (usually beeswax); a procedure applied to almost all carved feicui. B-quality is treated with hydrochloric acid solution to bleach or remove impurities from between cracks and grain boundaries and impregnated with paraffin wax or polymer plastic to fill out the cavities thus created, and enhance its translucency. Detection of this enhancement generally requires infrared spectroscopy, a technique performed in a gemmological laboratory (Hughes *et. al* 2000: 16), but a trader said polymer treatment can be detected with a microscope on the flat side of cabochons, which reflects as a 'spiderweb' in the structure, and with UV-rays, which reveals polymer injection as a bluish hue. C-quality is subjected to the same treatment as B-quality or boiled to open cracks in its structure, and then infused with colour under high pressure. D-quality designates other materials, such as dyed quartz, chrysophrase, or glass, which are marketed as feicui. While traders in Ruili generally consider the B, C, and D-quality materials counterfeit, a promotional leaflet I received at the Orchid

[77] 'Synthetic' jadeite is the only material that virtually duplicates the mineralogical properties of jade. Scientists at General Electric successfully produced synthetic jadeite in the 1980s, and this material has "essentially the same chemical composition and crystalline structure as jadeite". To create a lavender color manganese is added to the melt, while the various shades of green are achieved by introducing chromium (Walker 1991: 28).

Jade Company in Chiang Mai suggested that over 90 per cent of jade in retail stores today are B-quality, and that the treatment with acid is particularly common in China. A statement that the Orchid Jade Company only sells A-quality jade perhaps unsurprisingly followed this suggestion. While the structure of jade allows for easy absorption of dyes, acid bleaching and injection of polymer and colour makes the jade structure more brittle, and the colour will eventually fade, turn yellow in sunlight and cloudy in hot dish water (Hoffman 2005: 3; Shi *et. al.* 2009: 191-192; Hughes *et. al.* 2000: 16).[78]

For buyers, the determination of a piece of feicui as counterfeit effectively drains it of its valued properties. But it might be full of dangerous substances. A young man said his mother bought a feicui bangle, which looked counterfeit to him. He told her not to wear it, because it could be radioactive and full of dangerous chemical substances. They took the bangle to a shop, where a worker knocked it with a metal hammer and from the sound determined that it was not feicui. His mother consequently stopped wearing it. Several informants voiced similar concerns about how chemicals used to treat counterfeit jade might via the skin enter and damage human bodies, although nobody could specify which chemicals.

The omnipresence of deceiving and potentially dangerous counterfeits renders authenticity anxieties and authenticating strategies particularly pertinent in Chinese markets. The trader Mr Min emphasised that when buying feicui your mind should focus on the stone, rather than on the vendor, but then proceeded to warn me to stay clear of Burmese street vendors, who often sell counterfeit feicui. Mr Min thus urged attentiveness to two different types of relationships relevant to authenticating feicui. The first type of relationship is between buyer and stone, and the second between buyer and seller. Reflecting ethnic stereotypes, business stratification, and hierarchies of trust, Mr Min's warning also points to the relative ease with which mobile street vendors could disappear after a transaction, whereas fixed shops are easier to hold accountable if discovered to sell counterfeits. I was therefore often advised to buy jade only from reliable shops, which usually indicated larger shops, as opposed to small

[78] Hughes *et. al.* (2000: 16-17) further include 'assembled stones' as imitations: "These include triplets made by taking a highly translucent piece of pale-colored jadeite and cutting it as a thin, hollow cabochon. A second cabochon is cut to fit snugly into the first, with a green cement or jelly-like substance placed between the tow. A third, flat piece of jadeite of lower transparency is then cemented onto the base". Another type of assembled stone is made "with a piece of extremely dark green jadeite hollowed out to eggshell thickness. This allows light to pass through, creating the appearance of fine Imperial jade. To strengthen the piece, the hollow back is filled with an epoxy-like substance, and to hide the deception, the piece is then mounted in jewellery with the back hidden". Other ways of imitation includes pale jadeite cabochons coated in their upper surface with green plastic, or first placing a dye layer on the piece and then overlaying it with varnish (ibid: 17).

mobile stalls. In Ruili's Zhubaojie jade bazaar, Burmese Bamar and Rohingya vendors did on a few occasions offer me counterfeit feicui jewellery, which was easily distinguishable by an even layer of colour that came off when I rubbed the stone with my thumb. This did not happen inside shops or with people I knew well.

While Ruili's professional traders probe the surfaces of feicui pieces with hammers, flashlights and touch to assess their internal content through sound, sight and feeling, the local government has introduced gem-testing stations, which employ gemmological methods like spectroscopic analysis, X-ray diffraction, and refractive index readings. These methods determine feicui through mutual exclusion. For example, by placing light refracted by feicui into numerically demarcated domains, the boundaries between domains can exclude the possibility of it being another material, such as *ruanyu*. Such exclusive categorical definitions can be seen with James Scott (1998: 11) as a "narrowing of vision", which "makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation", thereby facilitating "schematic knowledge, control, and manipulation". Part of intensifying commoditisation of feicui nationwide, the promotion of such standardized evaluation scales and methods addresses authenticity anxieties mainly among Han Chinese feicui tourists in Ruili.

If gemmological tests determine a material as genuine jadeite, the gem-testing centre provides the buyer with a certificate, which usually certifies authenticity using the Chinese term feicui and sometimes further classifies the material as 'A-quality' (authenticity certificates are not issued for B, C, and D-categories, which are considered counterfeit). Certificates issued by government-backed gemmological institutions feature a serial number that is registered in a database, alongside weight, hardness, kind, and refractive index for the feicui piece. However, because government agencies are widely associated with corruption in China, they are not uniformly considered legitimate guarantors of the authenticity of feicui. While the gemmological certificate manifests claims of a detached determination of feicui, some buyers express concerns that the certificates themselves may be counterfeit. As one buyer asked: "How can I know that [the gem-testing stations] do not have a deal with the shop owner?" Without public trust in institutions like the gem-testing stations, the gemmological certificate thus has little value, and may even amplify authenticity anxieties. Furthermore, both the personal preferences and attachments of individuals to particular stones and the material singularity of individual stones prevent a comprehensive standardized system of valuation of feicui to be widely implemented. Also, the gemmological methods only work on exposed crystalline substance, and thus

cannot determine authenticity of the substance inside skin-covered stones. The popular Chinese expression "gold has a value, but jade is invaluable" (*huanjing you jia, yu wu jia*) may in that sense point both to the high economic value of jade throughout Chinese history, and to the lack of a standardized principle for its valuation. It may also suggest that jade in China is so unique and special that it is ideally not commensurable and convertible to a monetary price.

For tourists and inexperienced buyers, the partial indeterminacy of feicui and the lack of a trusted disinterested evaluation method amplify concerns about the authenticity, quality and value of their purchases in Ruili. For them, authenticating feicui often becomes a matter of trust between people, rather than between person and stone. Tourists often visit feicui shops with a tour guide, who profits from their purchases, but also assumes certain responsibility for bringing them to trustworthy vendors. Visitors with local connections usually buy from a seller they trust, or bring friends with local connections or knowledge about feicui, when they shop. Some go through the more prolonged process of establishing their own guanxi relations with suppliers in Ruili. Conversely, the potentials of feicui for the city's professional traders are predicated exactly upon the lack of disinterested ways of evaluating it. For them, the only way to realize these potentials is to cultivate an intimate knowledge about the material. To "follow the stone", as the carver Wang Chaoyang suggests.

## Immutable Jade and Ephemeral Humans

As ordered chemical structures with characteristic compositions, forms and properties, minerals are self-assembling, and maintain structural integrity across time (Root-Bernstein 2019). This structural integrity can translate into a metaphor for a morally valued temporal and societal stability. Some carvers and traders posit feicui as manifesting the temporal-material solidity and durability of an idealised natural world, which is juxtaposed both to the ephemeral temporal existence of humans as such, and to particular human moral and spiritual deficiencies in contemporary Chinese society. This somewhat symmetrical relationship compels us to consider feicui as a technology that facilitates human imaginations our positions in wider social and temporal orders.

Mr Min is a feicui trader in his early 40s, who presents himself as a devout Buddhist. He said:

> Jade is very old, it has existed in nature throughout history. But we people are young. When we face jade, we are very small. We cannot own jade, but it can help us think about our place in the universe. But these days, many people do not appreciate these traditional understandings of jade. They just buy it as investments, or to show off.

Mr Min here portrays jade as a persistent solid material existence through which to understand the transitory existence of humans. He also passes a moral condemnation of the replacement of such traditional beliefs in jade by its uses as a store of value and signal of wealth, even as he himself makes his living from the intense commodification of jade in contemporary China. While spiritual and economic domains can be morally conflicting in China, the potentials of jade may be realized in both domains for a person. A shop assistant at the Golden Star jade company similarly pointed to a tension between the use of jade in extrovert quests for social status versus more interiorised uses of the material as a technology for imagining a cosmos of which humans are but a tiny part. She said that especially businessmen buy carved feicui figurines, and place them conspicuously on their desk at home or at their office. For some, this is a way to show off their wealth, while others use the figurines to look at and ponder (*xinxiang*) the natural world. Paraphrasing Berque (1995), Descola (2013b: 30) writes of the Japanese garden, "the aim of this ultimate representation of Japanese culture is not to express an obsessive domestication of nature but to present a purified representation of the cosmos for the pleasure of contemplation". A similar argument may be made for feicui figurines. While carving figurines often involves arduous time-consuming human intervention into feicui stones, the best carvings are valued for their uncontrived exposition of a nature that is immanent in the material and that at once transcends and comprises humans, rather than for reflecting the individuality of the artist.

As co-owner of the Many Gemstones Company, Mr Huang made his staff memorize his homemade jade idioms and poems. One of them can be translated as follows: "A person can be one hundred years old, a spirit can be one thousand year old, but it takes one hundred million years to create jade" (*bai nian ren, qian nian yao, yi nian yu*). The idiom juxtaposes the human lifespan with the temporal genesis of jade, thus evoking a temporal extent and durability of jade that is essentially inhuman. This juxtaposition emphasizes the perishability and relative insignificance of humans in nature in a manner similar to how Mr Min finds humans small when facing jade. The jade trader protagonist in Charles Nicholl's (1988) travelogue-novel *Borderlines* articulates both a universal temporal extent that exceeds the human

lifespan and a singular character of individual feicui stones, which humans can fathom by looking through the window ground into the skin of feicui stones: "What you see inside the window there has taken a million years. What you see on the surface is the mark of a moment. Every stone tells a story" (ibid: 218). The carver Mr Yang posted a picture on his WeChat wall of a jade boulder with an open window exposing green feicui, accompanied by the text "a boulder changes, life again exposes a miracle, exposes a story again" (*yi kuai shitou gaibian le, renshen you yi ge qiji, you yi duan gushi*). Here, Mr Yang points to the window as an exposition into the miracle of life and an independent story encapsulated inside the jade stone.

Rather than exclusively relegating feicui to a domain of inanimate unresponsive objects, such descriptions at once animate feicui as a manifestation of the same principle of life that animates humans, and posits feicui as a nonhuman mirror for the human condition. While each stone comprises a singular materiality and story, it also encompasses a transcendent principle of temporal unchangeability. For the carver Wang Chaoyang, the unchangeability of jade even makes up for a sincere existence when juxtaposed to what he sees as the changeability and insincerity of people. He explained: "To speak with people can be very exhausting, but to communicate with stones is a relaxing process. There may be surprises inside the stone, but the stone does not change itself".

For Wang, the role of jade as a cultural and spiritual anchor assumes urgency in a transformative time in China, where people are increasingly insincere, materialistic, and concerned with exposing social status and identity. He addresses a society and people that seems somehow out of balance:

> I often discuss with my students that now the atmosphere of Chinese society is anxious. It is difficult for people to become quiet and contemplating. Some young people learn a little bit, and they feel proud. They care more about showing themselves, but actually if you only try to show yourself, but don't care about your environment, its difficult to show yourself. Like a carving, if you only care about the portrait, and you don't take care of the surrounding of the portrait, it is difficult to really make this portrait. Only when you balance the environment can you really show and build up yourself. This process about a stone is also about a person.

Wang Chaoyang's narratives often implied different meanings and interpretations that he did not make explicit, and there is an analogy to be made here between, on the one hand, the relation between the implicit and the explicit and, on the other hand, the relation between indeterminacy and determination. In his words, as in his

manner of speaking and conducting himself, Wang invokes ideals of harmony, balance, quiet introvert contemplation, and transcendence of personal ambitions. Both the use of jade in identity projects of Chinese consumers and the ambitions among young jade carvers of exposing and gaining recognition for their skills can be juxtaposed to Wang's ideal of balancing a portrait with its surroundings. Even though Wang did not make this explicit, the relation between a portrait and its surroundings seems analogous to the relation between a person and society, and he seemed here to hint at a societal imbalance related to a rising ego-centred conception of identity as an individual core. Wang Chaoyang's ideal of abandoning ambitions of projecting one's identity and social status to be readable to others resonates with the Taoist ideal of 'non-doing' (*wu wei*), which signifies that beings or phenomena in harmony with Tao behave in a natural, uncontrived way, similarly to how the planets revolve around the sun.

Bregnbæk (2017) discusses how Christianity for young converts in Beijing provides withdrawal from a perceived emptiness of the political sphere and fills up 'interior spaces of hope' that promise to restore a sense of agency in their lives. In a somewhat similar manner especially some Han Chinese carvers and traders, who have moved to Ruili from urban Eastern China, frame their engagement with feicui as a withdrawal from perpetual changes in Chinese society, which provides an experience of something unchangeable and genuine. Many see jade as a manifestation of Chinese 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua*), and Chloe in Shanghai sees the renewed demand for jade among urban Chinese as part of a 'national fever' (*guoxue re*), manifested also in a blossoming of teahouses, kung fu schools, and traditional Chinese music. The Han Clothing Movement discussed by Carrico (2017) and the rediscovering of tea as an expression of Chinese identity discussed by Zhang (2014) and Sigley (2015) similarly manifest a new cultural nationalism thriving on nostalgia and a reconstructed past. Unlike the 'culture fever' (*wenhua re*) of the 1980s, when Chinese after three decades of Maoist isolationism looked outside China for inspiration for new subcultural expressions and political demands in a climate of openness, the current 'national fever' looks inwards and backwards.

Mike Featherstone (1991) discussed nostalgia and conceptual linking of authenticity and tradition as reactions to an overload of things, images and information, accompanied by rationalization and disintegration of grand narratives in late modern societies. We may detect both Confucian ideals of balance and harmony, and Buddhist and Taoist ideals of interiority and 'non-doing' in diagnoses of spiritual deficiencies by some feicui carvers and traders, including Wang Chaoyang. The

urgency of such moral critiques seems likewise to be reinforced by an abundant volatility in contemporary Chinese consumer society. Some of my informants see the temporal and material solidity of jade as an antidote to such deficiencies.

The quote from Jeffrey Cohen's (2015) book *Stone. An Ecology of the Inhuman* with which I initiated this chapter, might strike a Modern Western mind as contradictory. Cohen suggests that stone is 'inhuman in its duration', but that 'the lithic is not some vast and alien outside' and a 'limit-breaching intimacy persistently unfolds' (ibid: 2). But if we find it hard to imagine the inhuman as something *not* outside the human it is perhaps because we are thinking from an anthropocentric dualism that constitutes ourselves in relation to that which is different in mutually exclusive terms.

Min, Wang, and Huang in different ways invoke immutability as a temporal, material, and spiritual property of jade. Its immutability points to how jade as stone is essentially 'inhuman in its duration', as Cohen writes. This inhuman character of jade serves as a mirroring device that allows these jade enthusiasts to imagine both a general human condition that includes temporal mutability, perishability, and relative insignificance, and a changing Chinese society that comprises human spiritual and moral deficiencies and imbalances, such as insincerity, anxiousness, and ostentation. This section has thus proposed certain conceptual symmetrical functionality in informants' juxtaposition of humans and jade as essentially different. In the following sections we shall see how their conceptual relation can also take the parallel form of analogy and metaphor, which emphasises similarities between humans and jade, as well as how Cohen's 'limit-breaching intimacy' may unfold in interactions between them. When informants portray jade as both essentially different from, and similar to humans, my task in the analytical scheme I forward here is not to determine whether jade is either different or similar to humans, but rather to demonstrate how and why it is sometimes accepted as both/and; that is, to convey a measure of indeterminacy that not only characterizes feicui itself, but also the material-conceptual boundaries between feicui and humans.

## Predestined Encounters, Luck, and Karmic Transmission

In Ruili, meetings and interactions between people, as well as between people and feicui, are often described with the concept of *yuanfen*, which can mean destiny, predestined encounter, or natural affinity. In a related manner, the concept of luck

(*yunqi*) counterbalances human agency in the feicui market. Meanwhile, some informants posit feicui as an accumulator and transmitter of karma (*ye*) between humans; properties that entail human agency to a greater extent than yuanfen and yunqi.

Some respondents described our meeting each other as yuanfen, which characterizes a predestined and warm encounter. During an interview with a feicui carver, I rephrased a statement he made. He said: "Some people have yuanfen with Buddhism. You have yuanfen with feicui. You understand what I mean about the character and nature of feicui". Yuanfen indicates that forces beyond human agency guide encounters and relationships. Such forces or agency can operate both in interpersonal relations and in human-jade relations, and some buyers say they do not choose particular pieces to buy, but rather that the feicui chooses them, thus placing agency in feicui.

People, who plan to depart with a piece of feicui to realize its economic value, may be interrupted in their decision by their yuanfen with the stone. A woman in Ruili told me about a friend of hers, who wanted to sell her feicui pendant, because she expected to make a good profit. One night, she dreamt that her teeth were made of jade. After the dream, she decided to keep and wear the pendant, and with time, it acquired a darker and more translucent green colour. While an increasing depth of colour may occur due to oxidizing of jade over time, such material changes are often thought to indicate that feicui absorbs the *qi* of its wearer. The woman took its material change as a sign that she had yuanfen with the piece of feicui.

A yuanfen encounter does not always last throughout time, as it may be interrupted by other yuanfen encounters. Sometimes, traders depart with a piece of feicui before realizing its economic value, because the stone has yuanfen with another person. In such cases, regrets about economic losses do not make sense. The same woman further told me about a famous local businessman, who bought a large boulder and cut it. He found nothing inside, and used the boulder as a tea table, until one of his Burmese workers bought it for a few hundred *Yuan*. The worker found top-quality feicui inside, and sold the boulder to a Hong Kong investor for more than 50 million *Yuan.* The previous owner said: "That is the charm of feicui. It did not belong to me. It belonged to someone else. He had yuanfen with the stone". Yuanfen can supersede economic concerns. A woman said she felt yuanfen with a feicui bracelet she bought. "Then the price is irellevant", she said. "I had to get it. Its value cannot be measured in price".

While feicui often takes a position as inalienable jewellery, heirloom or gift in kinship domains, we have seen how people may choose to transfer it into a market domain as an alienable commodity to acquire money. A jade carver told me a story about a man in Ruili, who wanted to start up a business in the 1980s. He sold two feicui bracelets for 5.000 *Yuan* to acquire start-up capital. After some years, he was a wealthy businessman, and he wanted to buy back the bracelets. But no matter how much money he earned, it was never enough to match the exploding prices of feicui, so he never acquired enough money to buy back the bracelets. The enormous price rises of feicui from the 1980s onwards made many people rich, but also in this story appear as a kind of curse, which maintained a separation between feicui and its original owner.

Many traders stress the importance of *yunqi* in picking the right stones to buy. Similar to yuanfen, also yunqi counterbalances the human agency of cultivating knowledge and skills of evaluating feicui, and yunqi is also related to the impossibility of knowing for certain what hides beneath the skin of a 'betting stone'. Traders buying a stone full of feicui for a low price are said to have yunqi, which is posited as a principle guiding (lack of) success among traders in the feicui market. Similar to how yuanfen generates singular, sometimes short-term encounters, yunqi is intersected in the particular circumstances of each finite transaction, and does not necessarily characterize a stable and continuous condition. A trader might thus have yunqi in one transaction, and not in another. Meanwhile, one can improve the possibility of having yunqi in particular situations.

The Buddhist jade trader Mr Min explains that choosing the right stone demands both experience and yunqi. One way for Mr Min to improve his yunqi is through prayers. He says: "Jade jewellery will bring luck and safety to its wearer, but only if you believe in it. Personally, I believe in jade." This belief in feicui separates Mr Min from traders, who engage solely with the material as an alienable commodity. Mr Min's belief includes the potential of jade in influencing minds and bodies of humans. For example, touching a piece of feicui makes him feel peaceful (*anjing*), and he also believes that jade jewellery can stimulate blood pressure in the human body. While Mr Min attempts to improve his yunqi through Buddhist prayers, we have also seen how certain kinds of feicui carvings like the S-shaped *ruyi* are said to bring yunqi to people wearing them.

I interviewed a young woman in Shanghai, who pointed to an efficacious correlation between luck in business and the inherent nature, figural form, and spatio-temporal positioning of materials in Taoist cosmology. The woman wears jewellery

hosting different gemstones, which she believes beneficial both to her body and the profits of her online gemstone business. She finds suppliers of gemstones on online platforms like Taobao, Baidu, Tieba and WeChat, which she makes into jewellery by coiling them in copper string. She then sells the jewellery on Taobao (a Chinese equivalent to Amazon) and via her WeChat wall. She started the business in May 2016, and earned an average monthly profit of around 1.000 *Yuan* up until April 2018, where she earned 3.161 *Yuan*. She ascribed the steep incline in her profits to her father's intervention. Knowledgeable of Chinese geomancy, fengshui, her father in April 2018 gave her a natural crystal and a copper statue of *Pixiu*; a mythical creature with the body of a lion, the head of a dragon, and a pair of feathered wings. Pixiu is said to have a strong appetite towards gold, silver and jewels, which it will bring to his master in his mouth. Statues of Pixiu are thought to attract wealth in fengshui, as the creature does not have an anus, and thus cannot release the wealth elsewhere. Bataille ([1933] 1985: 119) sees gift giving as the sacrifice of a 'part of oneself' through 'excretion'. Pixiu seems to operate on a reverse principle of 'constipation', fetching and releasing wealth undigested to its owner via its mouth, somewhat like a hunting dog. The woman's father taught her how to use a compass, which she downloaded as an app on her mobile phone. She placed herself in the centre of her bedroom and pointed the compass towards the window. She noted the coordinates as 235 degrees southwest, and sent her position to her father. Combining this information with knowledge of her astrological position based on her time of birth, the father employed a geomantic magnetic compass (*luopan*) to make a geomantic calculation. He ascribed the crystal to *gengua* (7th of eight trigrams in Taoist cosmology, representing mountains) and the pixiu to *kangua* (6th of the trigrams, which represents water), and advised his daughter to place the crystal at a certain location northeast from the window on 16 April 2018 between 7 and 9 am and the pixiu at a location north from the window on 17 April 2018 between 5 and 7 pm.

In the geomantic cosmology, different materials, times, and positions are believed to have different efficacy, and the father's advice was based on his daughter's wish to increase her luck for earning money. From 1 April to 15 April, the woman's jewellery business had earned her 663 *Yuan*, but from 16 to 30 April her earnings swelled to 2498 *Yuan*. She ascribed her new luck in business to the placement of the crystal and the copper pixiu in her room. While the spatial and temporal placement of the two objects was based on a universal principle of fengshui, it was the material 'nature' of the crystal that increased the woman's luck in business (its shape had not undergone human intervention), whereas the efficacy of the copper statue of pixiu emanated

from its figural shape, irrespective of its material composition. This case demonstrates how yunqi as a cosmological principle can be influenced both by the 'natural' material composition of objects, by their figural shape made by humans, and by their relative spatial and temporal position, as determined through geomantic calculation.

While both yuanfen and yunqi entail nonhuman agency, conceptions of feicui as an accumulator and transmitter of karma charge the material with potentials that to a greater extent derive from human action. These potentials may later be realized in the lives of other humans. In 2015, there was some trade in 2nd hand jade, both online and via pawnshops. But Cindy and Chloe, whom I interviewed in Shanghai (see Chapter 3), said you have to be careful about used jade, because you do not know which kind of karma has been deposited in it. Cindy wore a jade bracelet inherited from her great-grandmother, and figured that since her great-grandmother belonged to a rich bourgeois Shanghainese family before the communist take-over, the karmic transmission should be favourable. She thinks her great grandmother's spirit in the jade protects her from bad events or accidents. But articulating this, she becomes unsettled: "Actually, I don't know if my grandmother has accumulated some bad karma that could be passed on to me. My grandmother had money, but later it went downhill". She tells me her mother was targeted during the Cultural Revolution, because she was from a bourgeois family. Her friend Cindy intervenes: "If the jade is from your family, it will protect you for sure", she says. "And I feel all people from Shanghai has money". Cindy is from a poorer northern Chinese province and seems to suggest that comparatively speaking the 'economic karma' of a jade from a Shanghai family cannot be too unfavourable. Kopytoff (1986) discussed how objects accumulate a history in the form of a pedigree of former owners, which may enhance its value. But as Cindy's story shows, the 'biography' of used feicui jewellery also comprises a risk of new owners absorbing bad karma of previous owners.

## Social-Material Analogies

Differential investments in economic and spiritual potentials of feicui are to some extent socially manifest in engagements in *guanxi* and *junzi*. Compared as ideal-typical interaction forms, guanxi can be seen as extrovert and focused on form, and junzi as introvert, manifesting substance. In Ruili, guanxi interactions facilitate transactions of different resources for traders, whereas the ideal of the 'gentleman',

junzi, is more intimately tied to the substance of jade, and constitutes a template for self-cultivation and interaction especially among carvers.

As discussed in Chapter 5, guanxi underpins business in China's market economy as ways of establishing trust and reciprocity through informal exchanges of gifts, favours, and money. Sántha and Safonova (2013: 30-67) discuss the Russian term *pokazukha* ('to show off') as a non-communicative, ritualized performativity, which allows Evenki people to maintain their distinctive ethos when dealing with Russian bureaucracy. Guanxi interactions in Ruili similarly follow a ritualized form that makes it possible for people to do business together without necessarily engaging 'substantially' in trading partners or the object traded.

The Hunanese hotel boss Mr Liu told me, "We are farmers. We are not educated. We came here to Ruili to make money, because we heard that there are good profits in the feicui and hotel business". Mr Liu appears pragmatic, unsentimental and skilled in guanxi interactions. His wife and child staying in his hometown, Mr Liu brings different young girlfriends to Ruili's nightclubs. While guanxi interactions help expand Mr Liu's business networks in Ruili, he expresses no overtly affective engagement with his interaction partners, or with feicui.

Mr Liu laughs: "Actually, us Hunan people, we don't like feicui. We like gold. And we like money". With its more restricted evaluation parameters of carat and weight, gold is more easily translated into decipherable economic value than feicui. Gold signals money – the higher weight, the more money - and for new rich Chinese entrepreneurs like Liu consequently also social status in a more direct way than feicui. Gold can be melted and moulded into a standardized form, the surface and substance of which is congruent. Feicui has less potential for standardized reproduction, as it is harder, does not melt or bend, and exposes great variation between different types and pieces.[79] Furthermore, even when carved, feicui often hosts a tension between surface and substance, which varies with the type. The colourless, transparent 'glass type' (*boli zhong*) is thus easier to evaluate than 'ink jade' (*mo cui*), which is black on the surface but a translucent green when penetrated by light. A young woman said that gold is popular among China's new rich, while old bourgeois families fancy jade. She describes gold as shiny and worn to show off to others. She also feels that jade is

[79] These material properties, which constitute gold as standardisable and commensurable and jade as singular, also make gold less risky to steal than jade. Some royalty in the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) were buried in burial suits made of jade pieces sewn together with threads that signified the social status of the deceased. The jade burial suits of Emperors featured gold thread. In Ruili I was told that grave robbers only stole the golden thread of jade burial suits, because after being melted and molded it can easily be sold, whereas people would know where the jade comes from.

shiny, but that it shines 'inwards' rather than 'outwards', and consequently characterizes jade in opposition to gold as a material with 'substance' (*neihan*). A jade trader applied a similar distinction between exteriority and interiority to the use of jade itself, arguing that many young people wear jade outside on their clothes for people to see, but that "people who really care about jade will wear it inside on the skin".

I propose a juxtaposition between, on the one hand, an analogy between the shining exteriority of gold and the extrovert guanxi sociality of people like Mr Liu in Ruili's nocturnal leisure arenas, and, on the other hand, an analogy between the material inflexibility and complex interior substance of feicui and the interiorised substantial friendship of gentlemen (*junzi*) among jade carvers and aficionados in daytime arenas of teahouses and private homes.

Throughout Chinese history, jade has symbolized virtues, which people should strive to live up to, and can be compared to. The Ancient Chinese revered five material properties of jade; soft sheen, uniformity both inside and outside, sharp sound when struck, hard texture, and strength. These properties symbolized benevolence, justice, wisdom, courage and purity as five human virtues (Yu 2009: 4). Such ideals are used as a cultural resource in contemporary promotions of jade, and a promotional leaflet I received at the Orchid Jade company in Chiang Mai listed wisdom, modesty, justice, charity, and courage as five cardinal virtues of jade. Especially from the Spring and Autumn period (779-476 BC), artisans started making jade ware that were thought to manifest human personalities (Yu: 62). Incorporating the words of Confucius (551-479 BC), the Book of Rites (*liji*) linked the natural attributes of jade to Confucian morals and summarized eleven virtues: benevolence, wisdom, justice, courtesy, joy, royalty, faith, heaven, earth, morals and ethics.[80] These "became the criteria for gentlemen in conducting themselves in society with self-discipline, and the moral codes for scholar officials" (ibid: 63). Later, an account in *Shuowen Jiezi*, a first century BC dictionary, lists mineralogical qualities of jade and compares to with those of the ideal gentleman (quoted in Demattè 2006: 211):

[80] Confucius compared the visual traits of jade to worldly virtues: "Its polish and brilliancy represent the white of purity, its perfect compactness and extreme hardness represent the sureness of intelligence; its angles, which do not cut, although they seem sharp, represent justice; the pure and prolonged sound which it gives forth when one strikes it represents music. Its color represents loyalty; its interior flaws, always showing themselves through the transparency, call to mind sincerity; its iridescent brightness represents heaven" (Walker 1991: 32).

> Jade, the most beautiful among the stones, embodies five virtues. Its smoothness is warm, which is the virtue of humanity. Its translucence shows the core, which is the virtue of justice. Its sound reverberates and is heard far away, which is the virtue of wisdom. Its hardness can hurt, which is the virtue of courage. Its sharpness and purity do not provoke envy, which is the virtue of honesty[81]

Interior virtues of jade, such as purity, constitute a moral template for humans to align with, and while the physicality of humans and jade is dissimilar, deep engagements with jade for some affords a conception of homologous interiority that renders jade and humans not the same, but also not entirely *not* the same. Originally referring to the 'son of a duke', the nobleman or gentleman, *junzi*, has attained a homologous relation to jade, which manifests itself especially among a new generation of academically trained young male jade carving artists like Wang Chaoyang and Xu Yanping, who moved from urban Eastern China to settle in Ruili. In this group, junzi is a moral form of self-cultivation and interaction that can be activated and manifested by feicui itself, the relation between carver and feicui being more indexical and agential than symbolic and representative.

The carver Wang Chaoyang describes carving a piece of feicui as both exposing and refining (*zhuo*) its inner character. Refining a jade stone and a person is an analogous process for Wang, and he sees jade carving as a process of self-cultivation. Conceptualised with the term *zhuo*, carving involves a mutual determination of the character of feicui and its carver. But through knowledge of the cultural history of jade that Wang has acquired through his studies at the art academy in Beijing, feicui is also pre-determined for him, as it functions as an ideal that guides his moral self-perception and behaviour.

Another carver, Mr Zhou, describes how he and other carvers sometimes gather around a feicui stone. Sharing their ideas about how to read and carve the stone, or simply watching it in silence, they have developed deep friendships. Such interactions can be described with a popular idiom from the Warring States period (475-221 BC), 'a gentleman's friendship, as thin/plain as water' (*junzi zhi jiao dan ru shui*). The idiom analogises the gentleman's friendship with the softness and purity of water, and can also point to a thin, observable interaction form with a substantial content. *Junzi*

[81] Nicholl (1988: 221) quotes a description of the 'five virtues' of jade in *Shou Wen*, as follows: "Its lustre and brilliance is warm. This is the way of kindness. Its true nature may be seen from the outside. This is the way of rectitude. Its note is tranquil and strong. This is the way of wisdom. Its form may be broken, but cannot be twisted. This is the way of bravery. Its sharp edges are not intended for violence. This is the way of purity".

may in this sense be analytically opposed to guanxi relations, which are publicly displayed as solid, but for some participants feel superficial, hollow, and instrumental. Such 'gentleman' interaction may also contribute in developing a 'Ruili style' of carving through the sharing of ways to understand and carve particular pieces of feicui.

Kam and Edwards (1994) discuss the dyad *wen-wu* (literary-martial) as a masculine ideal or model in Chinese culture. *Wen* refers to refined qualities of literary and artistic pursuits of classical scholars, for example groups of men writing poetry for mutual amusement, while *wu* signifies physical strength, military prowesss and authority. Confucious embodies wen, while the famous general Guan Yu (160-219 AD) is a wu god revered in temples and shrines. One could be either wen or wu and they could be in opposition, but the ideal was often a balance between the two. In their gentle demeanor and sociality and their affective and philosophical approach to jade, jade carving artists like Wang Chaoyang and Xu Yanping exposed a masculinity that seemed closest to Confucian ideals like wen and junzi. Meanwhile, it is telling that the more uncouth and extrovert hotel bosses Liu, Wang, and Chu, had their most expensive feicui carved into pendants of the war god Guan Yu, who embodies wu and can resonate well with masculine capabilities and brotherhood in guanxi.

In Chapter 5, I noted that instrumental and affective relations are sometimes seen as conflicting in China, but that the former can also generate the latter (Kipnis 2002). But while Ruili's jade traders and carvers routinely switch between guanxi and junzi in different situations, we can see the realization of potentials of jade in economic and spiritual domains, respectively, as channelled through the two different ideal-typical interaction modes. In that sense guanxi and junzi are separate roads. For traders like Liu, strategic guanxi interactions facilitate market exchanges of feicui, which constitute the material as a container that can accumulate and release economic value. Meanwhile, for carvers like Wang and Zhou, their intimate interactions with feicui and knowledge of its cultural history charge and determine the material as manifesting the Confucian moral ideal of the gentleman, junzi, which in turn guides their interpersonal interactions in more interiorized, yet emotionally connected ways.

## Domains and Determination

We can conceptualize the determination of feicui as a temporary fixation of meanings and values in different domains. While such domains and their boundaries are often

flexible and unconscious, they may be objectified through juxtapositions and transgressions. Transferring feicui between domains may thus also concretize moral conceptions associated with each domain. While things like feicui are thus generically 'good to think', I place emphasis on how their material properties contribute in configuring their own determination.

A young woman compared the economic value of jade in monetary terms to that of an iPhone. In line with Chinese tradition, she expected to inherit jade through her maternal family line at her wedding or her mothers' passing away. But even though she preferred an iPhone to a piece of jade, she would not sell inherited jade. She explained this with a belief that jade jewellery worn on the skin is infused with the spirit (*ling*) of its owner, in this case her mother. The notion of *ling* being transferred between humans through jade brings to mind Mauss' ([1925] 1990: 11-12) discussion of how gifts for Maori are infused with the spirit (*hau*) of the giver. To accept a gift from somebody here, "is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul" (ibid: 12). As gifts are seen to contain something of the giver, objects given as gifts often take on human qualities (see also Graeber 2001: 35). For the young woman, selling inherited jade jewellery would to some extent amount to selling her mother's spirit. Her considering whether to do so juxtaposes and thus concretizes the economic potentials of jade as an alienable commodity in the market, and its social and spiritual potentials as an inalienable heirloom in the family.

Realizing the potentials of feicui thus involves placing the material in a wider system of categories. In Lévi-Strauss' (1962) structuralist analysis of totemism, social distinctions in the human world are made and affirmed through contrastive classifications of the nonhuman world. The use of natural species like vegetables and animals as totems is thus 'not because they are "good to eat" but because they are "good to think"' (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 89). Combining a Marxist focus on production with Saussurean structuralism, Graeber (2001) sees value as potentials. Emanating from "hidden, generative powers of action", value is "inherently contrastive", and can only be realized in "a relatively public context, as part of some larger social whole" (ibid: 47, 70). This point is similar to Lévi-Strauss' (1963: 34) basis for comparison of phenomena that "acquire meaning only if they are integrated into systems". These discussions remind us of how homologies and juxtapositions between feicui and humans determine them referentially within a wider set of conceptual categories or domains.

Elaborating on linguistic structuralism, some subsequent hermeneutical approaches that posit objects as signs in relation to a human grammar reinforce a distinction

between a single natural world and plural meaning-giving cultural worlds of humans. Heeding Lévi-Strauss' premise that things are 'good to think' while de-universalising a distinction between human meaning and material matter may support a notion of feicui as guiding human conceptions, rather representing them. Along that line, Pedersen (2007) discusses how the Darhad Mongolian shamanic costume "triggers peoples' momentary conceptualisation of social relationships which otherwise remain unseen" (ibid: 141). As Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007: 26) put it, the objects of Pedersen's analysis "are more than representations of specific kinds of social knowledge, rather they are the vehicles whose very form and substance make that knowledge possible". Similarly, the absorbing and transmitting properties of jade facilitate an articulation by the young woman discussed above of her moral relationship with her mother. The relationship is signified by spirit, *ling*, which can be transferred from the mother into jade, and from here passed on to the daughter.

Chinese author Jian Ma (2014) writes of a turquoise stone that carries a trace of its wearer in the form of her scent. Ma encounters a Chinese soldier in Tibet, who had had an affair with a young Tibetan woman that got married to two brothers and died in childbirth. She was to be buried in a sky burial. It was the soldier's first love affair, and she had given him a necklace: "He took out the necklace from the drawer […] It was a string of agate and red wooden beads, with a large lump of turquoise in the middle. The turquoise was smooth and dark, and still smelt of the woman's milky skin. I thought of her now, sitting in the hemp sack on the platform of mud bricks" (ibid: 13). The turquoise functions as a 'technology of the imagination' in the sense that the woman's tragic story was made evocable by the capacity of the turquoise stone to absorb and transmit her scent.

While feicui may thus mobilise and concretise human concepts and domains, it is also to some extent self-referential in conditioning its own determination. Descola (2013a: 23) sees in structural anthropology a monism of the mind and of the world that creates the grounds for "a method of analysis in which natural relativism – the variety of environments – plays a role elsewhere allotted to cultural relativism". If a prominent trait of cultural relativism is self-reflexivity, we could perhaps suggest the partial self-determination of nonhuman phenomena like feicui as a feature of such a natural relativism. My discussion of how the materiality of feicui, as compared to that of gold, restricts standardised valuation in that sense supports an attention to how differential determination of certain things derives from their comprising different 'natures', rather than exclusively from different 'cultural' interpretations.

## Oppositions and Transgressions

Certain historical and contemporary conceptions of jade in China seem to soften a definitive distinction between humans and nonhumans, and point to a positing of opposites as mutually constitutive, rather than mutually exclusive.

We can identify in Chinese cultural history three properties of jade that are particularly pertinent to human bodies: jade as a *receiving container*, a *stimulating agent* and a *protective shield*. We have noted how jade is thought capable of absorbing human energies, while containing properties that can affect the human body and mind. Providing another example of how feicui is thought effective in conditioning human bodies, a shop assistant in the Golden Star jade company said that the number of 'spots' (*bandian*) on the skin of elderly people will be reduced on a wrist that wears a feicui bracelet, as compared to a wrist that does not. Feicui, in turn, will become more 'smooth' or 'lubricated' (*run*), when worn on human skin, as compared to feicui not worn by humans. Feicui bracelets are usually worn on the left hand wrist, as they are also said to have beneficial effects on the heart. Jade has furthermore been used both to shield the body from dangers in the outside environment, and to block energies from leaving the body. Addressing the first type of shielding, a woman from Shanghai told me about a woman who was left unharmed in a crash while her jade bangle broke, arguing that jade will sacrifice itself for its owner if she is in danger.[82] Exemplifying the second type, ancient carved funerary jade functioned as a shield against an internal draining, as it was thought to prevent life-nurturing essences from leaving the body. The 'nine orifices' (*jiuqiao*) jade, for example, was thought to block the two eyes, two earholes, two nostrils, the mouth, genitalia and anus from leaking human energy (Yu 2009: 14). Funerary jade was thus "believed to make both bodies and souls immortal and even to help souls enter heaven and gain a new life" (ibid). I asked a trader if the quality of the material influenced such beneficial effects of feicui? She confirmed and showed me her mother's two wrists. One of the wrists had less dark spots on the skin than the other, and she said this was because her mother wore a 'glass type' feicui bracelet on that hand. A lower-quality type of feicui would not have reduced the emergence of spots as much, she said.

[82] I heard various versions of this story from different informants in Shanghai, Ruili, Kunming, and Chiang Mai. In all cases, the jade that broke to save its owner from harm in an accident was a bracelet. In one case, the accident involved a pregnant woman falling down, in another it was a plane crash, and in two cases it was a car crash. Hughes and Kuznetsov (2000: 8) likewise note this belief: "If the wearer is caught in an accident, the jade will break, leaving its owner unharmed" (see also Hughes *et. al.*: 15).

Conceptions of jade as a container, stimulant and shield for energies and properties in human bodies to some extent dissolve a definitive contrastive demarcation of humans and feicui as self-contained units. Mutual effects, such as the change of colour in jade or the stimulation of blood pressure in humans, presuppose interaction via the human skin, and some people therefore never take off their jade jewellery. Human skin thus appears as a porous boundary that can be penetrated by nonhuman agents, as also noted Bunkenborg's (2009) discussion of 'empty disorders' (*xubing*) in rural north China, which indicate "that the integrity of persons is undermined by an internal vacuity that makes them likely victims of spirit possession" (ibid: 7). A similar notion is coined in Chan's (2014) analysis of Minnan *Tangki* war magic, which is at once virtual and actual, where intruding spirits and ghosts are exorcized from human bodies with material weapons. In a different ethnographic setting, Willerslev (2007: 89-119) describes how the animist Yukaghir during hunts mimic their animal prey, courting and luring it like they would a sexual partner (see also Descola 2013b: 18). Thinking and acting like animals in certain contexts here imply a transient metamorphosis, which however does not permanently dissolve the human-nonhuman distinction.

Modern Western thought has been described as resting upon a separation between mind and matter, human and nonhuman, culture and nature, representation and reality (see, for example, Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007: 6–9; Graeber 2011: 244; Latour 1993; Descola 2013a, 2013b). Chinese philosophical tradition might in turn be seen as directed towards a unity of opposites, rather than their separation. Levi-Strauss (1962: 89) saw the Taoist *yin-yang* system as the most general model of correlations and oppositions, "the union of which results in an organized totality", while Freiberg (1975: 321) described the Taoist ontology as "of a unified world, which is made manifest in paired oppositions". As Bunkenborg (2009: 9) points out, the *yin-yang* symbol itself indicates the mutual constituency of opposites, which "contain the potential of each other". An account of nephrite jade collection in the White and Green Jade Rivers in Xinjiang during the reign of the Emperor Qianlong (1735–1795) describes how women were thought best suited to recognize jade with their toes, "as the female *yin* attracted the male *yang* that emanated from the stones" (Levy and Scott-Clark 2001: 14–15). In this description, jade was seen by Chinese officials as hosting an active *yang* potential directing it towards the passive female *yin*, while in the Book of Changes (*Yi Jing*), jade is conversely associated with the *yin*, as opposed to ice in the *yang* line (Freiberg 1975: 312).

People in Ruili commonly emphasize the attraction of opposites as an explanation for why men wear jade necklace pendants carved as the female Bodhisattva *Guanyin*, while females wear carvings of the male Buddha, *Fo*. They interchangeably describe jade as female and male, passive and active, soft and hard, cold and hot, and pointed to both *yin* and *yang* qualities of jade. For example, a woman told me that when she has a fever, she places a piece of jade on her foreheard. At first, the jade is hot, but after a while, it becomes cold, and by then also her head feels cool. The point is not to determine jade as either one thing or another, but rather to evoke mutual attraction, nourishment, cultivation, calibration, and harmony of opposite principles. Raffles (2010) discusses how participants in cricket fighting in Shanghai assume a perspective, where they are both similar and different to crickets, an apparent contradiction, which "simply persists as a fact of existence and does not require resolution" (ibid: 215). Likewise, onceptual opposites encompassed by jade are not always sought determined as either-or, but are often accepted as both-and. We have seen how gemmological evaluation methods seek to determine a stone as being something particular, while economic and spiritual investments in skin-covered 'betting stones' address their indeterminacy; their potential of being different things.

## Distance and Intimacy

This chapter has discussed how carvers, traders and consumers in Ruili engage with feicui as both as an indeterminate container for human investments and as a determined agent that interacts with humans in various ways. An opaque surface of feicui conditions human concepts and domains, as well as the trade, valuation, and eventual determination of feicui itself. This opaque materiality may feed into concerns in contemporary Chinese society that exterior manifestations cover a lack of internal authenticity, quality, and value. But whereas counterfeit feicui manifests a lack that invites distrust and anxiety, the indeterminacy of skin-covered 'betting stones' mobilizes agency in evaluating stones to sell, buy, and carve for those who cultivate specialized knowledge and skills.

I initiated this chapter by asking why jade is so highly valued in China. One economic answer is that more Chinese people have invested in the material as a tangible store of value following the draining of value in other investment domains like real estate and stocks. These investments have to some extent constituted jade in China not unlike gold as bullion money; that is, a "material substance that is also an

abstraction", a valuable material publicly trusted to be exchangeable for other goods (Graeber 2011: 18, 245).[83] Simmel (2005 [1900]: 60, 62) discussed a process of objectification and abstraction that departs from a "an undifferentiated state in which the Ego and its objects are not yet distinguished" and "gives rise to a distance between the self and its objects, through which each of them becomes a separate entity". As we have seen, some of my informants express moral concerns about the commodification of jade. While such concerns may address the commodification of many types of things, the broadly based and intimate relations between jade and many Chinese people to some extent resonate with Simmel's 'undifferentiated state'. Such human-jade relations further support Descola's (2013b) argument that "the modern West's way of representing nature is by no means widely shared", and that in many regions "humans and nonhumans are not conceived as developing in incommunicable worlds or according to quite separate principles" (ibid: 30).

As jewellery; inheritance object; agent in carving processes and predestined encounters; accumulator and transmitter of spirit and karma; spiritual anchor and index of cultural tradition; ideal for self-cultivation and interpersonal interactions; as well as a stimulant, container and shield for human energies, jade is sometimes seen as interacting with humans in intimate and mutually constitutive ways in China. Such intimate interactions may render the massive commodification of jade in contemporary China morally disturbing for some, but they also underpin a consumer demand that preconditions this commodification.

[83] Graeber (2011) writes that Chinese rulers in the period from 2200-771 BC "used pearls and jade as their superior method of payment, gold as their middle method of payment, and knives and spades as their lower method of payment", which suggests an institutionalized acceptance of its value backed by political authority (ibid: 219).

# Conclusion: Opening Up

This dissertation has examined trade, carving, and use of feicui (jadeite jade) in China, and some implications of its mining in Myanmar's Kachin State. It has discussed how feicui markets are structured by armed conflict in Myanmar; by policies and economic growth in China; by cross-border trade networks, social relationships, and new technologies; and by materialities of feicui itself. The dissertation has further discussed use of jade in China as an object for economic investment, money laundering, and payment in illicit transactions; as a symbol of national identity and cultural refinement; and as a technology of the imagination and an animated agent that interacts with humans through processes like absorption, transmission, stimulation, and shielding.

Feicui is different things for different people in different contexts. For some, feicui is primarily an investment, or trade object. The value of investment objects can inflate and deflate rapidly and precipitiously in contemporary Chinese markets. I have described how feicui markets in China boomed from 2008 until late 2013, when anticorruption policies and declining economic growth deflated demand for high-, and mid-grade feicui, which diverted investments into low-grade feicui and amber. Rather than proposing a single feicui market, I have pointed to different local markets and market trajectories for different versions and grades of feicui, and how they develop in contingency with those of other gemstones.

In the context of market fluctuations, some traders make value by staging exhibition environments for feicui, and by adopting new technologies like online auctioning. Other traders insist that materiality of feicui itself and the cultivation of deep feicui knowledge through tactile engagements with the material is most important. The impersonal transactions in online auctioning skip these engagements, and therefore invite (fear of) fraud and counterfeiting. We have also seen how some regret the massive commoditisation of feicui and how arguments that feicui should be worn 'inside' against the skin rather than 'outside' of the clothes disparage its use as a status symbol. Feicui thus becomes an object of contention and negotiation of meanings, values, and morality in a transformative Chinese market economy, similar

to how Zhang (2014) describes a heterodox *jianghu* arena after Yunnanese Puer tea had been 'overcooked' in the market.

Uses and meanings of jade in China change over time. For example, while jade was denigrated as a bourgeois luxury during the Cultural Revolution, it is repackaged as a symbol of national identity in the current era. Feicui could be characterised as a conflict mineral in Myanmar's Kachin State, but aspects of its Kachin 'biography' are filtered out in China, where the Communist Party structures a discursive space that leaves little room for critique of China's negative impacts in other countries. This purification of feicui in China is facilitated by the conceptual subsumption of the material into the generic Chinese category of jade (*yu*), which, as traders proudly note, hosts 8.000 years of cultural history in China. In a society that engenders both rising national pride and concerns about authenticity and the pace and character of development, jade is alongside materials and practices like tea, kung fu, and calligraphy repackaged as an authentic element of 'traditional' Chinese culture. For some, this new connection with jade has happened concurrently with a connection with 'traditional' Chinese philosophies like Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Based on Lévi-Strauss' argument that natural species are 'good to think', I have explored how jade affords perspectives. I have proposed the concepts *spectrum* and *spectre* as metaphors for methodological and theoretical potentials of jade. Following jade in different contexts has allowed for a *spectrum* of domains in China to 'be seen'. These include policies, legality, markets, networks, actors, exchange forms, values, knowledge, and even lack of knowledge. Jade is material, tangible, and visible, which provides a concrete starting point for examining its intangible, or *spectral*, potentials. For example, I have discussed how the ideal material purity of jade specifies the moral and spiritual purity of the Confucian gentleman *junzi* and the related 'scholarly' *wen*-masculinity among jade carvers. I have also related how some male Han Chinese jade traders analogised a value hierarchy of jade types with a hierarchy between 'fair skinned' Han Chinese potential wives and 'dark skinned' Burmese potential girlfriends. Here, jade concretised distinctions between 'we' and 'them'.

As possibilities for culture, nonhumans are not just generic but also specific, and I have argued for a closer scrutiny of how materialities matter. Descola (2013b) sees in Chinese philosophy an expression of 'analogism' as an ontology that makes order out of a world of singularities through analogising. Feicui is a singular material. Each stone is unique. Outlining a vernacular nomenclature for feicui in Ruili, I have pointed to how properties of different feicui types and sub-types stimulate a plethora of analogies to human and nonhuman phenomena. While gemmologists 'pigeon-

hole' jadeite according to standardised parameters like chemical composition and refraction of light, Chinese traders address its material diversity with a battery of terms that construct value hierarchies on the basis of similarities and differences. Also, the material opacity of skin-covered feicui betting stones gives rise to a notion of indeterminacy that resonates with the Taoist notion of 'emptiness' (*xu*) as a potential that can be realised in different ways. The singularity and indeterminacy of feicui – its material resistance to standardisation and certitude – are key aspects of people's fascination with the material, and opens up a space, in which cultivating intimate personal knowledge through tactile engagements with the material can translate as profits in the market. Traders must calculate with risks that a feicui stone does not contain what they expected it to and that the market next year can differ from this year. This necessitates openness and flexibility in relation to feicui and to markets. The classic symbol of a Chinese ethos of flexibility is that of the bamboo, which sways with the force of the wind, but does not break.

Some scholars are not comfortable with 'ontological' and 'new materialist' approaches. If ontologies are seen as essential, static, and mutually exclusive worldviews, the scepticism is on point. Rather than proposing a single 'Chinese ontology', I have pointed to different intellectual resources and rationalities that reflect in how people engage with, and talk about jade in different contexts. Still, the notion of mutually constitutive opposites underpinning different phenomena, human and nonhuman, is pertinent in China. Opposites can be multiplied almost endlessly through analogising, and I list some oppositions discussed in this dissertation in the appendix. Iterative holism could be one term for describing how similarity spans scales, such that a small jade talisman can be a fractal of a large jade Buddha and a jade stone a fractal of a jade mountain.

Theories should open up, rather than narrow down perspectives. Also, the most exciting aspect of ethnography should be opening up views into worlds we are not familiar with. If our own certitudes are disturbed in the process, we may have learned something. Ethnography and ethnographic writing is not that different from jade carving; both practices demand an ethos of openness and flexibility and a willingness to learn from, and adjust through engagements with the material.

# Epilogue: A More Ethical Jade Industry or More of the Same?

The front-page picture of this dissertation is of a figure of the Buddha *Fo* carved in feicui. The figure was for sale in a market in Yingjiang. After the front page, I have included a painting by Hkawn San, a 16 year-old ethnic Kachin girl. Hkawn San was displaced from her village due to the military conflict in the Kachin State, and has lived in an IDP camp for the past 8 years, surviving on donated food and materials and staying in shelters with the threat of fighting still present. Since 2014, she has attended an NGO project, which encourages the displaced children to communicate their feelings and experiences of conflict and displacement through art. Hkawn San's painting depicts people and jade stones. Some of the people are partly covered by stones. Maybe this refers to the many workers, who have been caught in landslides at the mines.

The two artworks point to different stages in the social life of feicui. The polished feicui carving is the fronstage. It is what many Chinese buyers see, cherish, and spend fortunes on: An animated material, a piece of art. Hkawn San's situation and her painting is the backstage that many jade buyers to *not* see. Raw stones dug out of mountains under dangerous conditions in a mining area rife with heroin; military conflicts for control of the mines; displaced children. As two sides of the same story, the frontstage and backstage testifies to how mining, trade, and use of feicui affects different people in different ways. For some, feicui is related to war, disease, accidents, and ecological devastation; for some to economic gains and losses; and for others to culture, identity, relationships, philosophy, safety, luck, and health.

Whether profits in the jade industry will be more fairly distributed and its detrimental consequences in the Kachin State hampered depends on developments in both Myanmar and China. Upon taking office, the National League for Democracy (NLD), headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, in 2016 suspended issuing of new gemstone licenses and extension of existing ones, pending a governance review intended to clean

up the sector.[84] But in December 2018, Myanmar's parliament passed a bill, which paved the way to restart jade mining licensing. Meanwhile, during the two years moratorium, illegal mining, smuggling, ethnic violence, landslides, and environmental destruction continued unabated in the Kachin State. Paul Donowitz at Global Witness commented: "Myanmar's NLD-led civilian government has squandered a crucial opportunity to genuinely reform the jade sector and prevent the country's military-linked elite, cronies, hidden Chinese business interests and United Wa State Army-linked companies from pilfering the country's precious resource wealth to the detriment of its people and environment".[85] The 2018 gemstone law does not address licensing criteria without which "companies with histories of illegal activities and irresponsible mining practices will be able to obtain new licenses", nor "serious conflicts of interest within the military-dominated Myanmar Gems Enterprise, which both regulates the gemstone industry and controls lucrative commercial stakes through joint venture agreements with companies". Also, the law also does not tackle corruption risks in valuation and taxation. Therese Sjöström at Swedish NGO Swedwatch describes the feicui industry as a 'financial engine' for the armed conflict in the Kachin State.[86] Allowing for more of the same practices, the new law seems bad news for the peace process.

Neither in China do stimuli for a more ethical feicui trade seem on the horizon. Due to the long and intimate relation between Chinese people and jade discussed in this dissertation, Chinese consumer demand is not likely to disappear. While I have noted market fluctuations, the feicui trade continues to be very profitable for a lot of Chinese people. By means of opaque deals, Chinese companies and businessmen are involved in massive resource extraction in Myanmar and many other countries around the world. Wealth earned by Chinese nationals contributes to what is domestically posited as China's legitimate and 'peaceful' resurrection. As I have noted, it is perhaps not surprising that Chinese feicui consumers are oblivious to, or do not feel responsibile for mining conditions in Myanmar. But I found it striking that even some rich feicui traders claimed not to know where feicui is mined. Some scholars see signs of a new ethics in volunteerism among younger Chinese (see Yan 2011: 66-67). Rolandsen (2008) found motivations for volunteering varying from expanding one's social networks and searching for a meaningful life to desires to obtain Party membership, while volunteering involved carrying out party-state propaganda programs (cited in Yan: 67). But volunteering and individual donations is mainly

[84] *Myanmar Times*, 27 July 2016.
[85] *Global Witness*, 20 December 2018.
[86] *The Guardian*, 25 Febuary 2019.

directed towards helping Chinese nationals, and charity donations in China in 2016 equated only 0.2 per cent of China's GDP, as compared to 2 per cent in the US.[87] It would take a low percentage of the earnings of the extremely wealthy Chinese feicui traders I have met during fieldwork to provide a better life for Kachin children that have been displaced due to the war. But none of the feicui traders I asked made the connection between their wealth and the situation in Kachin State.

Could we imagine a certification scheme that attests to whether feicui is mined in environmentally sustainable and economically transparent ways; whether armed conflicts surround mining and trade; and whether locals in the Kachin State benefit proportionally? And could we imagine Chinese consumer demand for 'ethical' feicui?

The Kimberley process sought to eradicate 'conflict minerals' in Africa through a certification scheme that adressed especially the role of diamonds in conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, and Congo. The result of the campaign, Naylor (2010) argues, was a consolidation of market dominance of the De Beers diamond company: "its main result was not to advance human rights and economic development […] but to further entrench corporate power while shifting the market advantage further from poor to rich producers" (ibid: 153). In Sierra Leone, De Beers controlled the market via a surplus stock, which it procured from producers and resold to cutters when sectors of the market began to heat up. The stockpile ceased to be a good investment as Russia emerged as a major gem-cutting centre from 1991, and Australia and Canada opened up diamond production. In 2002, Osama Bin Laden was reported to be behind traffic in diamonds and Al-Qaeda to have profited from the trade: "Soon the UN demanded the ban, not just of "conflict diamonds" but of all "illicit" stones, effectively any that bypassed official marketing agencies. Smiling broadly in the wings was De Beers" (ibid: 156). The certification scheme marginalised African producers, while allowing De Beers to unload onto the market identical stones from its own stockpile: "That stockpile, long a drag on its finances, shot up in value, the shares of the company along with it" (ibid: 156-157). De Beers began to microprint diamonds for retail with its logo and ID numbers as a supposed guarantee that the stones were 'conflict free'. But Naylor sees the claim as bogus: "once cut, there is no way to confirm a stone's origin. It is impossible even with a rough one" (ibid: 157).

As we have seen, the EU and US bans on Burmese-origin gemstones from 2007 and 2008, respectively, did not enhance human rights in Myanmar by hampering

[87] In 2017, Charities Aid Foundation, a British NGO, ranked China second from bottom (above Yemen) of 140 countries, based on the proportion of the people who say they give time, money or assistance to strangers. During Mao, the Party abhorred charity, because it could show the state's failings. NGOs still experience difficulties, because officials do not want independent organisations to grow large enough to pressure the Party (The Economist 6. September, 2018).

profits of the military regime. Rather, a boom in trade volumes and prices of feicui driven by Chinese demand from 2009, a breakdown of the ceasefire agreement between the Tatmadaw and the KIA in 2011, and the Tatmadaw's violent conquering of new mines followed the bans. One problem with a certification scheme is how to establish a trusted certifier that is tolerated by a military that pockets immense wealth from the industry as it is now. Another problem is to track the social life of stones mined by different groups in different areas. But the main obstacle is that demand comes almost exclusively from China. The efficacy of a certification scheme requires a cosmopolitan consumer ethics that applies to people of different ethnicity and nationality than oneself. But such an ethics is unlikely to develop in China's current ethno-nationalist political climate, in which information is heavily controlled by the CCP. Chinese nationals earning money in other countries means more economic power and less risk of domestic discontent for the regime, and with economic power comes less receptiveness to international critique. This is not to take Chinese people to task as egoistic villains, but to suggest that the policies, practices, and rhetorics of China's current political leadership are not conducive to more ethical practices and positive impacts in Myanmar's jadeite industry or in other industries in other countries with strong Chinese involvement.

With the pace and scale of mining in recent years, the feicui mines in the Kachin State are according to some observers depleting. Chinese capital will then likely move to other places, where poverty, corruption, and/or lack of legal regulation allows for its access. But more value and more fair distribution of it could be made without frantically emptying the Kachin State of feicui. I interviewed the headmaster of a jade school in Ruili with educational programmes in jade carving and trade. The school is sponsored by the Dehong Prefectural Government and the Yunnan Provincial Government, and in 2018 offered scholarships to 175 carving students from Myanmar. Carving adds significant value to feicui stones, and educating Burmese carvers could allow for more of this value to be realised in Myanmar. Also, a new generation of artists in Ruili is carving new ideas into new forms, as in Wang Chaoyang's jade carvings of local ethnic minorities and Xu Yanping's carvings of non-jade materials like bricks (fig. 17). Ideally, such novel practices and art forms could open up prospects for a less detrimental industry, in which human ideas and practice makes more – and more fairly distributed - value from less finite material.

# Appendixes

## Conceptual and Material Oppositions

| **Emptiness (xu)** | **Fullness (shi)** |
|---|---|
| Spirit, consciousness (jingshen) | Material, substance (wuzhi) |
| Principle, 'root' (yin) | Manifestation, 'fruit' (guo) |
| Formless | Form |
| Intangible | Tangible |
| Holism (fractals, iterations, analogies, similarity) | Reductionism (exclusive units, difference) |
| Mutually constitutive oppositions | Mutually exclusive oppositions |
| Indeterminacy | Determination |
| 'Cooked person' (insider) | 'Raw person' (outsider) |
| Friendship, gentleman (junzi) | Business, functional relationships (guanxi) |
| 'Scholarly' masculinity (*wen*), Confucianism | 'Martial' masculinity (*wu*), *Guanyu* (war God) |
| Interiority | Exteriority |
| 'Meat' (rou) of jade | 'Skin' (pifu) of jade |
| Purity, visibility | Opacity |
| Contemplate | Show off |
| Old | Young |
| Tea | Alcohol |
| Cooked (fermented) tea | Raw (unfermented) tea |
| Dark beer (stout, lager, porter) | Light beer (pilsner) |
| Opium, Heroin | Amphetamines |
| Subculture | Mainstream culture |
| Abdomen | Head |
| Low | High |

Conceptual and material oppositions

# Key Chinese Terms

*Anjing* 安静: Peaceful or relaxed atmosphere or state of mind
*Bao* 抱: Reciprocity
*Baobei* 宝贝: Treasure, darling
*Bendi ren* 本地人: Locals, for example in a town, county, prefecture or province
*Bianjingzhen* 边境证: Border passport
*Biaozhun* 标准: 'Standard' Chinese, northeast Chinese and Beijing dialect
*Bixie* 避邪: Ward off ghosts or evil spirits, for example with jade or amber
*Bwesa* (Burmese): (Jade) broker, sells jade owned by other people for a profit
*Bingdu* 冰毒: 'Ice', methamphetamine
*Chamagudao* 茶马古道: 'Tea Horse Road'
*Chao* 炒: 'Roasting', 'frying', economic speculation
*Chengyu* 成语: Chinese idiom
*Chuantong* 传统: Tradition
*Dakou* 打口: 'Punch hole'. Western LPs and CDs punched with holes and sold to China as waste plastic.
*Da laoban* 大老板: 'Big boss', rich businessman or entrepreneur
*Da laopo* 大老婆: 'Big wife', legal wife
*Dao* 道: Tao, 'the way'
*Dubo* 赌博: 'Gambling', for example investing in jade 'betting stones' (*dushi*)
*Ernai* 二奶: Second wife, mistress
*Fazhan* 发展: Development, for example China's economic devleopment
*Fengshui* 风水: 'Wind and water', Chinese geomancy
*Fo* 佛: Buddha, a popular jade carving form worn by Chinese women
*Fo wei yin, er fan ren ju guo* 佛畏因而凡人惧果: Idiom, 'Buddha fears the root, mundane people fear the fruit', principle of origin and manifestation
*Fubai* 腐败: Corruption
*Fu'erdai* 富二代: 'Wealthy second generation', children of rich entrepreneurs or government officials
*Gaige kaifang* 改革开放: 'Reforms and opening up' policies, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978
*Ganbei* 干杯: 'Dry glass', emptying a glass of alcohol
*Ganqing* 感情: Emotion, affection
*Ge li po* (Zaiwa language): 'Cart pushing man', transporter of jade stones
*Geti hu* 个体户: Private businessmen and entrepreneurs in China's reform-era

*Gen shen ye mao* 根深叶茂: Idiom, 'the root is deep, the branches exuberant', principle of origin and manifestation
*Guanxi* 关系: Social relation or network, often used instrumentally
*Guanyin* 观音: Buddhist bodhisattva, popular jade carving form among Chinese men
*Guo* 果: 'Fruit', manifestation, result
*Gupiao re* 股票热: 'Stock market fever', investment in stocks
*Guoxue re* 国学热: 'National culture fever', revival of 'traditional' Chinese culture
*Hei shehui* 黑社会: 'Black society', mafia
*Huaren* 华人: Overseas Chinese, for example ethnic Chinese in Myanmar
*He er bu tong* 和而不同: 'Unity in diversity', addresses ethnic diversity in China
*Huangniu* 黄牛: 'Yellow Bulls', middle-men, bring customers to shops for a profit
*Jianghu* 江湖: 'Rivers and lakes', a combative arena of itinerant knight-errands in literature and TV dramas. Can also signify contestation of official order
*Jing* 精: Semen, seminal essence
*Jingshen* 精神: Spirit, consciousness
*Jingling* 精灵: Spirit, genie, demon
*Jiuliang* 酒量: Alcohol tolerance
*Junzi* 君子: Gentleman, human virtues, Confucian values
*Junzi zhi jiao dan ru shui* 君子之交淡如水: Idiom, 'a gentleman's friendship is as thin/plain as water', sincere substantial friendship
*Kaifang* 开放: Openness, for example 'openminded'
*Kala* (Burmese): Term for Muslims of South Asian origin in Myanmar, also used by some Yunnanese about ethnic Rohingya
*Ketaohua* 客套话: Pleasantries, politeness, small talk
*KTV* : Karaoke club with private karaoke rooms and sometimes a 'big hall' (*dating*)
*Laobaixing* 老百姓: Common people, civilians
*Li* 礼: Etiquette
*Liangxin* 良心: Conscience, ethics, soul, spirit
*Liangxing* 良性: Benign, virtuous. Quality of 'raw tea'
*Lihai:*厉害: Fierce, skilled, 'bad-ass', used for example about alcohol tolerance
*Ling* 灵: Spirit
*Luopan* 罗盘: Magnetic compass used in Fengshui
*Mahuangsu* 麻黄素: A pill containing ephedrine, smoked as recreational drug
*Mianzi* 面子: Social 'face', esteem
*Neihan* 内涵: Substance, content, inner quality
*Pei* 陪: Accompany, used about female hostesses entertaining men in KTVs

*Pengyou quan* 朋友圈: 'Friend circle' on the Chinese mobile app WeChat
*Pianzi* 骗子: Imposter
*Puer cha* 普洱茶: Puer tea, a famous tea from the Yunnan province
*Putonghua* 普通话: Standard Chinese, Mandarin
*Qi* 气: Life energy
*Qianli* 潜力: Potential, power
*Qichang* 气场: Aura
*Qigong* 气功: System of deep breathing exercises
*Qing* 请: Cheers, invite someone for a toast
*Qingxing* 清醒: 'Clear-headed', effect of drinking 'raw tea'
*Renyi* 仁义: Benevolence
*Renqing* 人情: Human feelings, sympathy
*Ren yang yu, yu yang ren* 人养玉, 玉养人: Idiom, 'people cultivate jade, and jade cultivates people'|
*Shi* 实: 'Fullness', materiality
*Sheng cha* 生茶: 'Raw tea', unfermented tea
*Shengren* 生人: 'Raw person', stranger
*Shu cha* 熟茶: 'Cooked tea', fermented tea
*Shunhua* 顺滑: 'Smooth', feature of 'cooked tea'
*Shuren* 熟人: 'Cooked person', familiar person, acquaintance, friend
*Si hao* 四号: 'Number 4', slang for heroin
*Taobao* 淘宝: A Chinese online market equivalent to Amazon
*Taijiquan* 太极拳: Tai Chi, mental and bodily exercise
*Tatmadaw*: The national armed forces of Myanmar
*Toudu* 偷渡: Illegally crossing a national border
*Tuhao* 土豪 : 'Local tyrant', derogatory term for China's new rich
*Waidi ren* 外地人: Outsider, for example from another prefecture or province
*Wan* 玩: To play, to have fun
*Weixin* 微信: WeChat, a hugely popular Chinese social media, communication, and payment app for mobile phones, also used to trade jade
*Wenhua* 文化: Culture, Chinese high culture
*Wenhua re* 文化热: 'Cultural fever', new cultural expressions in the 1980s
*Wenhua jiaoliu* 文化交流: Cultural exchange
*Wenming* 文明: Civilisation, often referring to Han-Chinese civilisation
*Wen-wu* 文武: 'Literary-martial'. Two ideals of masculinity in China
*Wenxin* 温馨: 'Soft, warm, fragant', feature of 'cooked tea'

*Weixinzhuyi*: 唯心主义: Idealism, external reality is a product of consciousness
*Weiwuzhuyi* :唯物主义: Materialism, physical matter is the whole of reality
*Wu yi xi wei gui* 物以稀为贵: 'The rarer the material, the more expensive it is', economic value as relative scarcity
*Wuwei* 无为: 'Non-doing', Taoist ideal of aligning with the greater flow of life
*Wuxing* 五行: 'five phases' or 'five elements' (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), describes interactions with phenomena
*Wuxing* 物性: The nature of a thing
*Wuzhi* 物质: Material, substance
*Xiandai* 现代*:* Modern
*Xiao* 孝: Filial piety
*Xiaojie* 小姐: Young woman, also applied to KTVs hostesses and sex workers
*Xiaoshu minzu* 小树民族: Ethnic minority group
*Xibu dakaifa* 西部大开发: 'Develop the West'
*Xieqi* 邪气: Pathogeny
*Xin* 信: Genuineness (in people)
*Xing* 性: Nature, character, property, quality
*Xinxiang* 心想: Contemplate, ponder
*Xiongdi* 兄弟: 'Brother', close male friend, drinking buddy
*Xiuyang* 修养: Cultural accomplishment, self-cultivation
*Xu* 虚: 'Emptiness', spirituality
*Ye* 业: Karma
*Yin* 因: Cause, reason
*Yin-Yang* 阴阳: Symbol of holistic duality in Taoist philosophy
*Youjiu* 悠久: Traditional
*Yuanfen* 缘分: Predestined relationship, natural affinity
*Yuan yuan liu chang* 源远流长: Idiom, 'the origin of the river is far away, its flow is long', spatial and temporal perspective
*Yunqi* 运气: Luck
*Zhengqi* 正气: Vital energy
*Zhi* 智: Wisdom
*Zhibo* 直播: 'Live broadcast', app for online auctioning of services and goods
*Zhongyao* 中药: Traditional Chinese Medicine
*Zhubao shehui* 珠宝社会: Gemstone association
*Zhubao xuexiao* 珠宝学校: Gemstone school
*Zhuo* 琢: Refine, cultivate, for example cultivating self and jade through carving

# Chinese Jade and Gemstone Nomenclature

*Bai yu* 白玉: White coloured nephrite jade
*Baoshi* 宝石: Gemstone, including ruby, sapphire, emerald and tourmaline.
*Bi* 壁: Round, flat jade carving with a hole in its centre
*Bing zhong* 冰种: 'Ice type', the second highest type of feicui
*Bixi* 碧玺: Tourmaline
*Biyu* 碧玉: Jasper
*Boli zhong* 璃种: 'Glass-type', most valuable type of feicui
*Cakou* 擦口: 'Shaving open an entrance' in the 'skin' a feicui stone to expose its 'meat'
*Chuang* 窗: 'Window', opening grinded into the 'skin' of a stone to expose its 'meat'
*Chunse* 春色: 'Spring colour', pink colour in jade
*Cu dou zhong* 粗豆种: 'Coarse bean type' of feicui
*Cuixin* 翠性: 'Wings of a green fly', a colour in feicui
*Dan* 淡: 'Thin', 'pale', insufficient depth and intensity of colour in jade
*Dianjinshi* 点金石: 'The Philosophers Stone', jade
*Diwang lü* 帝王绿: 'Imperial Green', warm, smooth, even green colour.
*Dou zhong* 豆种: 'Bean type', fourth highest type of feicui
*Duan shui* 短水 / *gan shui* 干水: 'Short' / 'dry' water, feicui with low degree of 'water'
*Dushi* 赌石: 'Betting stone', feicui stone covered with opaque layer of 'skin'
*Feicui* 翡翠: 'Kingfisher jade', jadeite
*Gao bingzhong* 高冰种: 'High ice type' feicui
*Gao yao* 膏药: 'Plaster', metaphor for skin-covered 'betting stones'
*Gan* 干: 'Dryness', dry texture in jade
*Gou shi di* 够屎底: 'Dog shit type' jade, brown inclusions
*Hongbaoshi* 红宝石: 'Red gemstone', ruby
*Hua* 花; 'Flowers', irregular colour spots or patterns in jade
*Huangbing yu* 黄冰玉: 'Yellow ice jade'
*Huangfei* 黄翡: 'Yellow-green feicui', type and colour of feicui
*Huanglong yu* 黄龙玉: Yellow, and orange-coloured gemstone
*Huanjing you jia, yu wu jia* 黄金有价，玉无价: Idiom, 'Gold has a value, jade is invaluable'
*Hua shui boli zhong* 花水玻璃种: 'Flower water glass type' feicui
*Hupo* 琥珀: Amber, usually orange-red
*Jianguo* 坚果: Feicui stone featuring thick skin
*Jinpo* 金珀: 'Gold amber', bright yellow, transparent amber, usually from Myanmar

*Jiu Keng*: 'Relatively old mine' jadeite
*Jiuqiao* 九窍玉: 'Nine orifices jade', used in ancient Chinese burials to block the eyes, earholes, nostrils, mouth, genitalia and anus from leaking human energy
*Kai chuang* 开窗: 'Open a window' in the 'skin' a feicui stone to expose its 'meat'
*Kai menzi* 开门子: 'Open a door' in the 'skin' a feicui stone to expose its 'meat'
*Keng* 坑/ *Kuang* 矿: Mine
*Lanbaoshi* 蓝宝石: 'Blue gemstone', sapphire
*Lao Keng* 老坑: 'Old mine'
*Laokeng boli zhong ruyi* 老矿玻璃种如意: 'Old mine dragon glass type gratification', compound word describing mine, i type and carving form of a feicui carving
*Laolüse* 老绿色: 'Old green colour', type of feicui
*Long dao chu you shui* 龙到处有水: 'Dragon full of water', green feicui type with good texture and high transparency
*Longshi boli zhong* 龙石玻璃种: 'Dragon stone glass type' feicui
*Lung Seng* (Kachin and Jingpo language): Jade
*Lübaoshi* 绿宝石 'Green gemstone', emerald.
*Manao* 玛瑙: Agate
*Manao boli zhong* 玛瑙玻璃种: 'Agate glass type' feicui
*Mang* 蟒: 'Python snake', patterned structure on the 'skin' of feicui stones
*Mayashi* 马牙石: 'Horse teeth stone', coarse-grained type of feicui
*Maw* (Burmese): Mine
*Mengtou huo* 蒙头货: 'Commodity with the head covered', feicui where the 'meat' is not easily inferred from the 'skin'
*Mian* 棉: 'Cotton', visible mineral inclusions in feicui
*Mila* 蜜蜡: 'Beeswax amber', creamy yellow colour, often from the Baltic Sea region
*Mingliao shitou* 明料石头: 'Stone with clear understanding', the 'meat' of the stone is relatively easy to infer from its 'skin'
*Moyu* 墨玉: 'Ink jade', chloromelanite. Dark, but green when transilluminated
*Nen* 嫩: 'Tender', 'delicate', 'fresh' and 'youthful' yellow-green colour in feicui
*Nong* 浓: 'Thick', 'strong', good intensity and depth of colour in jade
*Nongdanshiyi* 浓淡适宜: Characterises a colour neither too deep, nor to pale
*Nuo bing zhong* 糯冰种 / *gao nuo* 高糯. 'Grainy ice type' / 'high grainy' type of feicui
*Nuo hua* 糯花: 'Grainy flower' type of feicui
*Nuo zhong* 糯种: 'Grainy type', third highest type of feicui
*Pifu* 皮肤: 'Skin', opaque grainy mineral layer covering feicui stones
*Pike* 皮壳 : 'Hard outer shell', thick, hard surface crust in especially mountain feicui

*Pingan kou* 平安口: Jade disk with a hole in its centre, associated with safety
*Pixiu* 貔貅: Mythical creature with the body of a lion, the head of a dragon, and a pair of feathered wings. Said to bring luck in business, popular as jade carving
*Qiao se* 俏色: 'Pretty colour', pretty, playful woman, feicui with different colours
*Qie* 切: Cutting jade stones to expose their 'meat'
*Quezi de yanse* 茄子的颜色: 'Aubergine colour', the best purple colour in jade
*Rou* 肉: 'Meat', jadeite content beneath the 'skin' of feicui stones
*Ruan yu* 软玉 : 'Soft jade', nephrite jade
*Run* 润: Smooth, 'lubricated' texture in jade
*Ruyi* 如意: S-shaped jade ornament said to bring luck to those wearing it
*Shanshi* 山石: 'Mountain stone', jadeite mined in mountains
*Shedai* 蛇带: 'Snake belt', a belt of colour in jade
*Shitou* 石头: (Jade) stone
*Shuhuayu*: 树化玉: 'Wood jade', petrified wood
*Shui* 水: 'Water', fine, glossy, transparent texture of feicui
*Shuihao* 水好 / *Shuichang* 水长: 'Good' / 'long' water, good texture in feicui
*Shui shi* 水石: 'River stone', jadeite picked from rivers
*Shui moyu* 水沫玉: 'Water foam jade', a type of jade
*Taung moo kyen* (Burmese): 'Head cap removal', removing overburden at jade deposit
*Tianchuang* 天窗: 'Heavenly Window', grinded in the 'skin' of a feicui stone
*Xi dou zhong* 细豆种: 'Delicate bean type' of feicui
*Xie* 邪: 'Irregular', 'evil', bad proportion between main colour and sub-colour in feicui
*Xi nuo zhong* 细糯种: 'Delicate grainy type' of feicui
*Xin Keng 新坑*: 'New mine' jadeite
*Xuepo* 血珀: 'Blood amber', dark red, semi-transparent amber, usually from Myanmar
*Yang* 阳: 'Sun', heat and male energies, light, warmth, and intensity of colour in jade
*Yangshu* 杨树: 'Poplar tree', 'integrity, particular yellow-green colour of feicui
*Yangzhiyu*: 羊脂玉: 'Mutton fat jade', white nephrite jade from the Xinjiang Province
*Yanse* 颜色: Colour
*Yiban de bingzhong* 一般的冰种: 'Ordinary ice type' feicui
*Yiban de boli zhong* 一般的玻璃种: 'Standard glass type' feicui
*Yin* 阴: 'Moon', cold, and female energies
*Ying yu* 硬玉: 'hard jade', jadeite
*Yu* 玉: Jade
*Yushi* 玉石: Jade stone
*Yun* 匀: 'Evenness' of colour of jade

*Zheng* 正: 'Purity', 'honesty', good proportion between main colour and sub-colour in feicui
*Zhong* 种: Type of feicui
*Ziluolanhua*: 'Purple colour flower', *Matthiola incana*

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# Spectral Jade

The trade in jadeite jade is a multi-billion-dollar industry that spans miners and military groups in northern Myanmar, traders and carvers in the Myanmar-China borderlands, and consumers in eastern Chinese cities like Shanghai.

*Spectral Jade* is a study of how the jadeite trade is practiced and why jadeite is so expensive in China. Based on ethnographic research among jadeite traders, carvers, and users, the study presents a spectrum of voices that points to why jade is called 'The Philosopher's Stone' in China, while jadeite could aptly be called 'Blood Jade' in Myanmar. Examining interplays of materiality and conceptuality in trade, carving, and use of jadeite, the study considers how nonhuman materiality matters in human imagining, and outlines contours of a Chinese holistic cosmology.

**Henrik Kloppenborg Møller** has done research in, and on China since 2005. His research interests include materiality, authenticity, knowledge, exchange, value, and identity. *Spectral Jade* is his doctoral dissertation.

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