

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this book has scrutinized the long process of Chinese incorporation of the land called *Yunnan*. It argues that Yunnan played an important role in cross-regional networks, that both global and local interactions contributed to Yunnan's final incorporation into the Chinese empire, that the imposition of imperial institutions and migrations played key roles in consolidating Chinese control over Yunnan, and that Yunnan has contributed much to the Chinese economy and in particular to the formation of a multiethnic nation-state. In the following section, four issues will be highlighted: a global perspective, a cyclical accumulative process, frontier expansion in late imperial China, and the formation and transformation of Chineseness or Chinese identity.

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### A Global Perspective into a Frontier Past

A global perspective indeed is woven into this book. By utilizing a global perspective to examine a local past that is usually confined to national history, this book writes a regional history in a global context. Global interactions characterized the history of Yunnan and some of them facilitated Chinese incorporation. First, cross-regional trade through Yunnan connected China, Southeast Asia, India, and Central Asia. Cultural exchanges took place simultaneously. Yunnan's role in this network would add a new dimension to the understanding of ancient and modern Eurasian communications.

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Second, the first Chinese conquest of Yunnan by the Han Dynasty in the late second century BCE was not driven by the profit of international trade. Instead, it was a planned military project to seek a route to Central Asia. As shown again in the Tang and the Song periods, the Great Wall frontier and the Southwestern frontier were closely associated and responded to one another.

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Third, during the seventh and tenth centuries, Nanzhao rose to challenge both Tang China and Tubo. Nanzhao also built its own tribute system over some regimes in mainland Southeast Asia. The rise of Nanzhao, to a large extent, should be accredited to the competition between Tang China and the Tibetan Empire. And this Nanzhao Kingdom, in turn, contributed to the decline of the Tang and Tibetan Empires.

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Fourth, it was the Mongols, the so-called barbarians, who finally conquered and brought Yunnan into China proper. The Mongol campaign was a strategy to surround Song China. The fall of Yunnan eventually provided a springboard for the Mongol occupation of China and some success in mainland Southeast Asia. Since then, administratively, Yunnan has continuously been part of China. Therefore, the submission of Yunnan to the Chinese empire was the result of global power struggles in the eastern Eurasian continent.

5

Fifth, the cowry monetary system demonstrates the global influence on Yunnan's transformation. Cowry money circulated in Yunnan until the second half of the seventeenth century, long after the Mongol conquest. The Mongols and later the Ming state attempted to rid Yunnan of cowries, but with little success, due to the close economic and trade relationship among Yunnan, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region. It was the dramatic expansion of the Atlantic slave trade that finally stopped the flow of cowries into Yunnan, ending in the collapse of the cowry monetary system. And this result facilitated the Chinese economic incorporation of Yunnan. Almost at the same time, copper coins replaced cowries, a symbol of Chinese victory over the Indian Ocean practice. In essence, the expansion of the European world-system helped the Chinese empire-building. 6

Sixth, in the beginning of the eighteenth century Japan began to control its copper export to the Qing Empire, which forced the Qing state to explore copper mines in the frontier province, an unprecedented and risky project. Almost throughout the eighteenth century, about five thousand tons of copper each year were shipped from mountains in Yunnan through the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal to Beijing. Therefore, changes in Asian maritime networks yielded a significant effect on China's core-peripheral relationship. 7

Seventh, at the end of the nineteenth century a myth of Yunnan was created by the French and British, as both of them, after mapping South and Southeast Asia, regarded Yunnan as the key to their colonial projects in East Asia. 8

Eighth, during World War II, Yunnan became China's only point of international access. The Burma Road, and later the well-known Hump Airline, served as arteries, and brought a great amount of materials to China. The new international situation and high technology resumed the glory of the Southwest Silk Road. 9

Finally, I raise a global question about the Chinese colonization of Yunnan. The Ming Empire, the Russian Empire, and European empires began their march into Yunnan, Siberia, and the Americas respectively, almost at the same time. Were their colonizations parts of the same global project? Were there any global forces behind these simultaneous movements? Or were they not relevant at all? 10

All these events vividly illustrate a local history with a global perspective. I argue that the fate of Yunnan was held neither in the hands of the indigenous population nor in the hands of the Chinese. Such a complex picture sharply contrasts with what has been found in the Chinese history in which Yunnan is assumed both to have been part of China from the very beginning and to have been civilized by China. Obviously, a national approach to a frontier area such as Yunnan is too simplified. In most cases, if not all, the simplification aims to build a national legend. Likewise, it is similarly dangerous to categorize Yunnan as part of East Asia or Southeast Asia. After all, history was born much earlier than nations. 11

## A Cyclical Accumulative Chinese Penetration

In viewing Yunnan in a global context, we should not underestimate the role of the Chinese. Indeed, we can see the cyclical but accumulative Sino-Yunnan interactions over the course of two thousand years. Zhuang Qiao's campaign (although his soldiers, just like those nomadic peoples from Central Asia who rode over China, were assimilated into local society) and the Qin's administration over part of northern Yunnan was the first tide of foreign expansion, ushering Chinese elements into this foreign land. 12

The fall of the Qin ended the official relationship with Yunnan. The threat of Xiongnu and the campaign against the Southern Yue turned Han China's attention to this seemingly isolated corner. Eventually, the Western Han court put its authority over most of Yunnan, and Eastern Han's continuous efforts gained the submission of the Ailao people, which basically brought present-day Yunnan into China's authority. This was the second tide of Chinese expansion. 13

The Three Kingdom period witnessed the competition between Shu and Wu for the control of Nanzhong. It was during this time that powerful local chieftains emerged, thanks to previous interactions between the Han Dynasty and the indigenous peoples. Nanzhong provided materials and soldiers for Shu Han's frequent northern expeditions. The Shu's rule was the third tide of Chinese interference. 14

The rise of native chieftains such as Yishuai and Daxing eventually led to Nanzhao in the seventh century. Nanzhao took advantage of the competition between Tang and Tubo, making itself the third rival in this international world. And Nanzhao expanded in all directions. The power of Nanzhao to a large degree made neighboring areas its own frontier. At the same time, both Chinese culture and Buddhism began to take roots in Nanzhao. The Nanzhao rulers used Chinese characters, wrote Chinese poems, and borrowed Chinese political structure while Tantric Buddhism was taken as state religion, which illustrates the confidence, flexibility, and success Nanzhao had in utilizing neighboring cultures for its own interest and development. The Nanzhao period was the fourth tide of Sino-Yunnan interactions in which Nanzhao played an extremely active role. 15

The horse trade maintained the material and cultural connection between China and Yunnan during the Dali period. And the Mongol campaign marked a new tide of foreign expansion. From then on, Yunnan's destination as part of China seemed unavoidable, as Chinese immigrants flowed in during the Ming-Qing period. 16

The above interactions can be described in terms of three periods: the Han period, the Nanzhao-Dali period, and the Yuan-Ming-Qing period. In the first period, the Chinese arrived and conquered; in the second period, native kingdoms thrived in Yunnan and challenged Chinese empires; and in the last period, the Mongols conquered and the Chinese incorporated. It was a process of cyclical accumulation. 17

### Frontier Expansion in Late Imperial China

Frontier expansion in late imperial China (here I refer to the Ming and Qing dynasties) has stirred many interests among scholars, although a large emphasis has been only on the Qing Empire. It is understandable that, without any doubt, the Qing Empire was a very successful world empire, no less amazing than the British or the Russian. As commonly recognized, it is the Qing Empire that had fundamentally established the territorial boundaries for modern China. Indeed it is very hard to exaggerate the Qing legacy in modern China in any realm of culture. Shepherd's Taiwan, Peter Perdue's Central Eurasia, and Millward's Xinjiang have all demonstrated the achievements of the Qing colonial enterprise. 18

Recently the new Qing school that has highlighted the central Asian connections and cultural elements of the Qing Empire has won wide attention in the academy. Rawski's presidential address probably represents and summarizes such academic efforts and trend.<sup>1</sup> Central Asian features, to a great degree, account for the colonial success of the Manchus on its northern frontiers. Nonetheless, the Qing's northern advance should not be used to compromise its advance in the south, for example, Taiwan, and the Southwest, including Yunnan and Guizhou; neither should it be utilized to underestimate the Ming colonial legacy. It is true that compared with the Qing, the Ming Empire was much smaller territorially and weaker militarily. However, while the Qing Empire had basically set up the frontier limits in the north, the Ming had done it in the south. Three key projects of Ming China, successful or not, had been the milestone of Chinese southern boundaries, namely, the incorporation of Yunnan and Guizhou, the failure of the Annam Campaign in the early fifteenth century, and Zheng Chenggong's takeover of Taiwan during the Ming-Qing transition. In fact, the Ming Empire was fairly aggressively in the south, while adopting a defensive strategy on the northern frontiers. Military colonization, peasant migrations, the reforms of native chieftains, and economic taxation all had been put into effect by the Ming state in these newly conquered southern frontiers. This, indeed, was the historical context for the Qing colonial entrepreneur. Without the Ming achievements, *gaitu guiliu* by the Qing state would have been impossible. In sum, the Ming state set up a solid foundation for Qing China's further incorporation in the South. Both the Ming and Qing states facilitated late imperial Chinese colonization, whether of Han Chinese or non-Han people. 19

## Local Identity and the Chinese Identity

The incorporation of Yunnan indeed throws some light on the issue of Chinese identity. While the Chinese imperial rule made many ethnic peoples on the frontier accept Chinese identity, the question remains: How did their acceptance contribute to our understanding of Chineseness? The case of Yunnan calls on to see Chinese identity and China as a process that went through many transformations. 20

China originated in the Yellow River region, but gradually expanded into the Yangzi and the Pearl Rivers. During this long-term process, many native peoples disappeared as they were absorbed into the Chinese, and their land was attached to the Middle Kingdom. The Chu people in the mid-Yangzi, and the Yue people in the lower Yangzi and southward, were originally not Chinese, but when they were conquered by the northern kingdoms, they as independent foreign cultures were incorporated into Chinese civilization. As a result, neither the Chu people nor the Yue people exist today, but they are thought to be Chinese because they contributed much to the formation, transformation, and sophistication of Chinese civilization. In this manner, the Chu and the Yue peoples were not Chinese two thousand years ago, but they are (thought of as) Chinese now. 21

The expansion of Chinese empires incorporated many non-Han ethnic groups and cultures. The joining of these native peoples surely brought new dimensions into and thus transformed Chinese identity. It is during this process that a multiethnic image/reality of the Chinese nation has been created. And this process is still ongoing. While the Chinese incorporation of Yunnan has been quite successful, results in Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang have been different. 22

A tentative comparison of Yunnan and Xinjiang may reveal that the Ming and Qing colonial infrastructures served as the key for the difference. The Chinese began to explore these two frontier areas almost at the same time as the Western Han successfully extended its power into these two areas. While the Eastern Han continued expansion in Yunnan, it was unable to hold the Western Region in modern Xinjiang. From the third century on, Chinese states held no real control over either frontier. Tang China expanded westward and put military garrisons in the Western Region, but was unable to resume control over Yunnan. Song China obviously had no authority over either Yunnan or the Western Region. The Mongols imposed some administrative control on both areas, but the degree is open to discussion. The Ming and Qing firmly controlled and gradually incorporated Yunnan while Xinjiang was not owned by China until the late nineteenth century when Xinjiang province was established. By comparing Yunnan and Xinjiang in the Yuan-Ming-Qing period, it is easy to see the difference. While Chinese states controlled Yunnan for ages, Xinjiang entered China quite late. While Chinese states facilitated and encouraged the move of several million immigrants to Yunnan, Xinjiang did not receive any large-scale Han immigration until the 1950s, when the CCP launched military colonization there. Likewise, while Chinese states made use of all kinds of Chinese institutions to replicate a Chinese society in Yunnan, this was not the case of Xinjiang. Consequently, while Yunnan created a new local identity as early as the end of the Ming, Xinjiang may have begun 23

this process as late as the second half of the twentieth century. This partially accounts for why the Chinese identity faces little problem in Yunnan but is severely challenged in Xinjiang. A similar conclusion can be made in the case of Tibet or Taiwan.

Essentially, this book, by scrutinizing the case of Yunnan, attempts to reveal a general trend in imperial China in terms of its incorporation, cultural and ethnic diversity, and the formation and transformation of Chinese identity within a global context. In short, it illustrates how both local (Chinese and non-Chinese) and global factors have made China a multiethnic unity.

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## **Notes**

**Note 1:** Rawski 1996.