

# **Clustered Communities and Transportation Routes: The Wa Lands Neighboring the Lahu and the Dai on the Frontier**

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## **Introduction**

This article aims to provide a perspective on the historical change of Wa society. The article locates these developments in the history of frontier formation from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in a context of Qing state extension toward the southwest mountains. The society of the Wa lands was a clustered system due to a historical chain of developments whose components included variable entities and occurrences, like the mining industry, migration, religious movements and the change of markets. The latter was bound up with the change in the salt policy, the integration of Dai chieftain into different socio-political arrangements, the rise and fall of the religious movement among the neighboring Lahu, the establishment of Han Chinese gentry power and so on. Historical reformations were not only linked with dynasties in the Burmese kingdoms and the Qing's frontier policy to integrate the Dai chieftains into the official county system. They were also linked to the demographic reconstruction in Qing China, as well as the coming of British colonial power. In this perspective, the reconstruction of the Wa society should be rechecked against a historical process of clustered fragmentation in the systemic transformation, from a long-term dynamic between interior Yunnan and Shan-Dai chieftains through tributaries and markets, to a system of early modern states with a distinctive borderline on the map.

These dynamics not only changed the relationship between China and Burma, but also changed the social landscape of local societies as the frontier of empires. In this way, the author argues that, in the last several centuries, many native groups were clustered into a terrain of fragmentation related to the power of the Dai chieftains, the Five Buddha Districts system among the Lahu, and the Han Chinese gentry based in Mianning. Through this long-term frontier reconstruction since the 1720s, the Lahu were initially mobilized but fell due to the attacks of the Qing army. Meanwhile the Dai chieftains were integrated gradually into a new, Han gentry controlled, frontier power, but the segmented Wa communities remained to become the border in a border making process after the 1880s. Thus, the Wa lands were not a system of isolated areas,

remote and outside the state power.<sup>1</sup> A detailed review of the history of frontier making shows that the Wa lands were not an instance of unique developments but integral components in social systems, sharing a certain political structure. The author argues that the so-called “autonomy” is also a foggy concept to explain social relationships. The article’s arguments are grounded in an analysis that takes into account the historical dynamic of the setting and continuing reconstruction among communities on the Wa lands.

In fact, social actors inhabiting the Wa lands participated actively in a chain that connected states and anti-state movements. This positively helped the Wa to strive for political and economic benefits, even if their efforts and struggles occasionally failed. Additionally, the Wa lands had been a long-term hinterland between some Shan-Dai chieftains, using the Quan (圈) system in the mountains,<sup>2</sup> before that hinterland became the border between China and Burma after the 1880s. Thus, the borders between the states had to be drawn from territories controlled by these Shan-Dai chieftains, from Yunnan to Burma. The borders of the Shan-Dai chieftains were also used to highlight the states of Burma and China. However, the modern state borders are situated along the mountain range and rivers in the region, and this border drawing created pressures that in turn were crucial for the reconstruction of the Wa communities.

In this article, based on Chinese historical documents and long-term field work, the author points out that the system of the communities on the Wa lands between the Shan-Dai chieftains had not been a unique political and social system with a homogeneity of ethnic boundaries against the Han, the Dai and the Lahu. Conversely, before the Wa lands became the border, there had been a long history of splitting and reconstruction involving local markets and political systems like the Dai chieftains, the Five Buddha Districts system and the Han Gentry power, due to continuing political changes on this frontier between Qing’s China and the Burmese kingdoms. The detailed historical sources, when examined from the standpoint of a microcosmic study of local political geography from the 1720s to the coming of British colonial power in Burma and beyond, indicate a history of drawn boundaries, clusters and resettlements, and competitive political systems on the mountains, and between communities on mountains and in the basins. In this process, the Qing state performed a crucial role, regardless of different alliances, resistances and conflicts. The latter were part and parcel of the situation of frontier building between big political powers like the Qing empire and Burma Kingdom, components in the weaving of huge demographic reconstructions, the mining industry and the secret society tradition of state politics, and so on. These dynamics seriously pushed natives and immigrants to

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 12; p. 22; p.213. Magnus Fiskesjo, “Mining, history, and the anti-state Wa: the politics of autonomy between Burma and China”, in *Journal of Global History* (2010) 5, pp.241-246. The author acknowledges the grants supported by the UGC-AoE Project “The Historical Anthropology of Chinese Society”, the RGC/GRF642112 and the DAG11HS01G of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The author’s special thanks go to Prof. Lilian Handlin for her constructive comments and editing.

<sup>2</sup> Ma Jianxiang, ‘The Three Elders of Frontier Defense’: State Agents and the Formation of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier in Late Qing and Early Republic, *Journal of History and Anthropology*, volume 10, no. 1 (April 2012): 87-122.

rapidly reform and compete. These and other contestations were an ongoing process lasting about two hundred years.

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, through the process of political reconstruction shaped by competition for mountain resources and trade routes, more and more Han Chinese settlers migrated to the southern Yunnan mountains, while the Qing government started waves of political reform to integrate the Dai chieftains into an official county system. The reshaped population distribution thus created endless resistances and political mobilizations in southern Yunnan, especially in areas of the western Mekong River on the Burma borderland. This reshaped the social landscape, because these political movements clustered natives into a segmented terrain. Meanwhile, the Five Buddha Districts system was established, which replaced the system of Quan in the mountains under the control of the Dai chieftains. Side by side, the Wa shared their lands with the newly established Five Buddha system in the west and east, between the Mekong River and the Salween River in general.

Additionally, several big silver and copper mines reshaped the groups, like the Upper Gourd King in the northern area of this terrain, between the Dai chieftains of Gengma and Menglian, before the 1740s. When Han Chinese miners penetrated this mountain society, they quickly established their connections with the Burmese kings in order to ingratiate themselves politically with the Qing government. Therefore, the regions of the Upper Gourd King were well mobilized and the mining industry and the caravan trade along the traditional transportation routes between Gengma, Mubang, Mianning and Jinggu began to flourish.<sup>3</sup>

On top of this, after the Five Buddha Districts system was established, more and more native communities on the northern Wa lands got involved in this political system against the Mengmeng and Gengma chieftains. Sometimes, Wa leaders performed a role in the tripartite situation between three Dai chieftains, the Mengjiao-Mengdong, Mengmeng and Gengma. These chieftains were supported by the Luohei monks in their competition with the Qing government, which supported the Gentry system in Mianning. However, in the middle and the southern Wa lands, the communities were still linked with the Dai chieftain in Menglian, until the Qing officials destroyed the Five Buddha Districts system, when the Lahu head, the Third Buddha Lord, became the political leader of this region based in Ximeng. After the Lahu were driven away from the center of Nanzha after the 1880s, the Aishuai and nearby communities in the middle of the Wa lands extended to the east, occupying the places the Lahu had left, to settle along the transportation routes to the Mekong River ferry ports. We can now see that the Wa communities lived in a seemingly stable equilibrium with other local groups like the Dai, the Lahu and the Han on this frontier, but we should realize that this was a relatively modern situation of reform after the coming of British colonial power to Burma.

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<sup>3</sup> Zhao Lian, *The Collection of Xiao Ting* (Xiaoting Zhalu, 1875), Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980, pp. 115-147.

The evidence indicates, in brief, that from the 1720s to the 1890s Wa communities moved frequently along the mountains and rivers, to respond to or cooperate with the Five Buddha political authorities. On the other hand, there were negotiations among the mountain communities to establish secure market control over commodities, especially over salt, cotton, tea and, later, opium. These and other developments had multiple causes, but the notion of “escaping-agriculture,”<sup>4</sup> as one scholar argued recently, was not among them.

The Qing government and British colonial power wanted to control native groups on the borderlands, but after the Five Buddha Districts system failed, the Wa were what remained. But at that point they were much more politicized than before the coming of the Five Buddha monks. In order to control mountain resources, especially through “head hunting” which was a tradition of some groups, Wa communities became more and more active. In this situation, the borders on the Wa lands were articulated along a system of trade routes competition. On the other hand, both China and Britain regarded the Wa lands as the border for state politics and domestic markets. Ongoing treaties negotiations and investigations continued until 1962 when the border was finally drawn across the Wa communities. However, the militarized Wa communities had been developing a system designed ultimately to control nearby markets, and their style of selecting trade partners was significant for the cultural mechanism of competition and boundary setting. The author argues that Wa lands used to be a long-term border between states, but the system of fragmentation due to political clustering was a remnant of historical political movements. The clustered fragments of the Wa communities exploited this situation well, to take control of the market and help them in their political competition with the Han gentry and the new state agency, especially after the 1880s.

## **The rise of the mining industry, immigration and the Five Buddha District system**

According to James Lee’s estimation, the population in Yunnan increased from about four million in 1775 to about ten million in 1850. Moreover, the population in southwest China doubled from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century, a period of three hundred years, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century, it doubled again in a period of 100 years.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the increasing rate of population growth in Yunnan was much higher than that of the rest of Qing’s China, because many members of the newly increased population were immigrants in the long term.<sup>6</sup> However,

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<sup>4</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 12; p. 22; p.213. Magnus Fiskesjo, “Mining, history, and the anti-state Wa: the politics of autonomy between Burma and China”, in *Journal of Global History* (2010) 5, pp.241-246.

<sup>5</sup> James Lee, *Social and economic history of southwest China*, Renmin chubanshe, 2012, p 151.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

from the 1720s to the 1880s, most of these migrants moved into the mountains area in southern Yunnan's frontier toward Burma, and most immigrants became deeply involved in trade and mining, especially before the 1850s.<sup>7</sup> Demographic transformation rapidly reshaped frontier societies in very diverse ways, but the immigrant penetration into southwestern Yunnan and Northern Burma mainly impacted long distance trade, caravan transportation, and the mining industry in the earlier period between the 1720s and 1850s, especially during the Qianglong reign (1711-1799). Along with these changes, secret societies quickly developed among the floating miners and then localized into native societies in the terrain between the Salween and the Mekong Rivers. The tradition of Chinese secret societies acted as a crucial shaping mechanism in forming the frontier's political landscape.

The Five Buddha Districts system was established based on this change. In the 1680s, a local Yunnan scholar, Zhang Baotai, established a new religious sect known as the Big Vehicle Religion on the border between Yunnan and Burma, in Tengyue area. After 1681, Zhang established his religious teaching center on Jizu Mountain, in Dali prefecture, which traditionally used to be a holy Buddhist mountain in southwest China. Zhang Baotai trained many students there, then sent some of them to spread this religion to different provinces like Sichuan, Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi and Jiangshu, or even Hebei province in northern China. The Qing government declared this religious practice to be an evil cult in 1743, and the founding father, Zhang Baotai, was arrested in 1730 and died in jail in 1751. However, his followers believed that Zhang's soul had incarnated into one of his students after his death. His student, Liu Qi, became the new master of this teaching but, in 1746, after it had been declared an evil religion, about 1500 followers were arrested. But many of the cult's followers escaped and continued to practice their worship in secret.<sup>8</sup>

The beliefs of this Big Vehicle teaching were mainly based on three sets of ideas and practices: 1. Spiritual masters could incarnate from one generation to another, maintaining the continuity of the teachings' network under Zhang Baotai's leadership; 2. Salvation was grounded in the belief linked to "three boats," including "the boat of teaching," "the boat of epidemics" and "the boats of iron." People could be saved from disasters, like diseases and magic attacks by enemies if they boarded these "boats" through their worshipping practices; 3. Once the followers joined the teaching, they should be divided into four sections. Each section consisted of branches which were organized into teams according to their name booklets. Some branch heads were appointed by their division masters according to the numbers of followers recruited. Based on multiples of 3, an organizer could extend his or her followers from 3 to 9, then to 27, up to 3700, whereupon the branch could be promoted to a higher level division, and its master promoted

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<sup>7</sup> Yunnan Provincial History Institute Compiled, *Collection of Historical Materials Relating to Yunnan in the Qing Veritable Records*, volume 4, Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1985, P. 786.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Yunsui, "The Zhang Yunsui Reports to the Emperor", in *Yunnan Historical Material Collection*, Fang ed., Kunming: Yunnan University Press, volume 8, p. 701.

likewise. Therefore, the masters of the Big Vehicle teaching could recruit all the people in the world if given enough time.<sup>9</sup>

As such, this teaching evoked strong Qing political vigilance and the Qiang Long emperor quickly declared it prohibited. However, one of the followers, a young monk, Yang Deyuan, escaped from Jizu Mountain to Mubang (Hsenwi in Shan state today) in Burma. After the wars between the Qing and the Burmese king of the Konbaung Dynasty, from 1760 to 1770, the monk Yang Deyuan came to the mine region, and established his temples at Nanzha and Mannuo near the Mekong River bank which was situated on important transportation routes. He trained more than 300 student monks at these two places, and passed on his teaching and leadership to his four most influential students in the 1790s before his death. Later, monk Yang's student, the monk Tongjin (Zhang Fuguo), was regarded by followers as an incarnated master, and this teaching quickly spread among the Luohei and other native villagers.<sup>10</sup>

During his lifetime, Zhang Fuguo established the Five Buddha Districts system in the west Mekong River mountains, which were named the Luohei Mountains by Qing officials due to the concentration of Luohei people there. The latter called themselves Lahu, but their name was written as Luohei in Chinese characters, though pronounced very much like Lahu. There were many important silver mines in this mountains area, including the famous Munai, Maolong and Xiyi mines. These mines brought an income of about 5000 *liang* silver in tax per year to the Qing officials besides their ordinary production which provided silver to the market, from the 1780s to the 1810s.<sup>11</sup> However, the mine industry declined after 1811 when the silver and copper mines became exhausted. From the 1750s, during the peak of the mining industry's development, the prefecture of Shunning officially controlled these mines for the purposes of tax collection and the transportation of melted copper from the Yunnan-Burma frontier in the western Mekong River. In this prefecture alone, about 300,000 to 400,000 *jin* copper (about 150 to 200 tons) were produced for the Qing government to mint coins, but the exact amount of silver production from these mines remains unknown.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, at some large mines, such as the Maolong mine in the northern Wa lands, the population of miners during this period was between 20,000 to 30,000 people. These mines were actually big industrial towns which attracted different people, including miners, caravan businessmen, monks and even prostitutes and opera troupes.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 687.

<sup>10</sup> Mong Guangyuan, *The Original Records on the Luohei's Convert at Mannuo*, Kunming: Yunnan Academy of Social Science library, 345-3-1950/1959, 1805.

<sup>11</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "Shaping of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier by Secret Societies Since the End of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, *Moussons*, vol. 17 (2011-1), pp. 65-84.

<sup>12</sup> Liu Jing edited, *The Qianglong Shunning Prefecture Gazetteers (1761)*, Hong Kong: Tianma Book Company, 2001, p. 244.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang Yunsui, "The Zhang Yunsui Reports to the Emperor", in *Yunnan Historical Material Collection*, Fang ed., Kunming: Yunnan University Press, volume 8, p.774; *The Inscription of Innovation Xianren Cave (1714)*; *The Inscription of Munai Mine (1777)*.

Historical archives provide further information about this population. To begin with, many immigrants who came from the inner provinces were miners and businessmen, who had long moved across the frontier between southwestern Yunnan and the Shan-Dai chieftains areas. Furthermore, even if neither the Qing government nor the Burmese kingdoms had direct control over this mountain terrain, the system of Five Buddha Districts developed rapidly, and was well maintained by the monks who followed the Big Vehicle teaching that the monk Yangde Yuan established originally before the 1790s. Finally, many communities including the Wa, the Luohei and the Han Chinese were mobilized into this Five Buddha Districts system, but the leaders of this localization were Han monks. This was the case especially after the decline of the mining industry in this region, specifically after the 1810s. Since then, many waves of social reconstruction have deeply reshaped Lahu and Wa communities.

One of the most important changes in this region was the separation of the mountain societies between the Luohei Mountains and the Wa lands in the east and the west, now set side by side. Beside the two concentrated mountain groups, in the basins Dai chieftains and Han officials in Gengma, Mengmeng and Mianning also maintained their polities. In the mountains areas, the Five Buddha Districts system was mainly controlled by Luohei villagers dwelling in militarized and centralized communities. By contrast, communities on the side of the Wa lands were fragmental and clustered, as a result of being driven out by the resettled Luohei from the northern and eastern Mekong River areas. The Luohei were pushed out of their older habitats by pressure from the Qing government and the Han gentry powers.<sup>14</sup> The following pages discuss the social fragmentation that materialized during the rise and fall of the Five Buddha Districts system in the western Mekong River mountains area.

## **Interaction between the Lahu, the Dai and the Wa communities and their attitudes toward the Qing state before and after 1880s**

The Luohei differed from other communities on Wa lands, and also from the mountains' original natives, inhabiting this territory prior to the Luohei and other groups' resettlement. The Luohei were mainly mobilized through political resistance in the mountain area south of the Ailao Mountains in central Yunnan due to the movements toward political integration of the Dai chieftains and the change in the salt policy. Growing numbers of Han Chinese immigrants to

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<sup>14</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "The Ethnic Politics in Ailao Mountains: Reforms to the Native Chieftain System since the Earlier Qing and the Mobilization of the Lahu Identity", *The Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, 78, 3: 553-602.

this region since the 1720s were another contributing factor to their mobilization.<sup>15</sup> Under the pressure of the Qing government, many native groups in the southern Ailao Mountains and the Mianning area moved toward the southern mountains area, between the Mengmeng and Menglian Dai chieftains, from the north to the south, and between the Salween River and the Mekong River from the west to the east. The Yunnan-Guizhou governors regarded the Luohei Mountains as a barrier of defense against Burma, and tried to drive the rebels into this region, especially during the Jiaqing reign (1796-1820).<sup>16</sup>

In general, many different migration groups moved into this terrain, including miners who worked in the silver and copper mines, and businessmen who were dealers and transporters of commodities from inland areas. This was the first category of immigrants. Among the arrivals, were also indigenous people, in the past inhabitants of the mountains area in central and southern Yunnan who, beginning in the 1720s, had also been driven away to the southwestern frontier by the Qing government. The fortunes of these two groups intertwined thanks to the rise and fall of the mining industry. They then got involved in the long term political mobilization of the resistances among the Luohei through the establishment of the Five Buddha Districts system led by the Big Vehicle Religion monks. The result was a much more integrated and reconstructed Lahu identity and culture.

Through this mixture and social integration on the frontier, the Han Chinese migrants who resettled from interior places in Yunnan like Dali, Chuxiong and Shiping, or provinces like Jiangxi, Hunan and Sichuan, were divided into different parts, and converted into different ethnic groups. Some of these miners merged with the Wa in villages in the Maolong mine areas, like the Zhao surname tribes.<sup>17</sup> Some of them became Luohei (Lahu), such as the Zhang Fuguo family, who began his life as a monk but also became later a military commander and was regarded as the E Sha Buddha by ordinary villagers. After Zhang Fuguo's death, his sons and grandsons were also regarded as the incarnated E Sha Buddha by the Luohei villagers. Thus, the Zhang family became the core of the leadership in the Five Buddha Districts system, and organized the Luohei villagers to fight with the Qing army and the Han gentry powers for more than two hundred years. However, another local group, the Han Chinese, consisted of immigrants who settled in the Mianning area and made it into a Han residential center. After more and more Han Chinese concentrated in the Mianning basin, the Qing government carried out a political reform in 1747. That reform integrated the Dai chieftain system into the official county system in Mianning (today's Lincang city). The Han gentry system developed

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<sup>15</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "The Ethnic Politics in Ailao Mountains: Reforms to the Native Chieftain System since the Earlier Qing and the Mobilization of the Lahu Identity", *The Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, 78, 3: 553-602.

<sup>16</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "Salt and Revenue in Frontier Formation: State Mobilized Ethnic Politics in the Yunnan-Burma Borderland since the 1720s", *Modern Asian Studies*, forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "Shaping of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier by Secret Societies Since the End of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Moussons, vol. 17 (2011-1), pp. 65-84.



subsequently. This Han political group became the most active agency to fight with the Five Buddha Districts based military forces. The Han gentry finally succeeded in destroying the latter the 1890s.<sup>18</sup>

Reviewing the different strategies of the Han's localization on this frontier shows that the Han migrants from the interior provinces were not necessarily the same as the Han Chinese ethnic group that competed here with the Luohei or the Wa. The result was a two centuries long competition between various political systems. The protagonists were the Han gentry, their power based at Mianning, the Five Buddha Districts system developed in the Luohei Mountains, the Dai chieftains who still maintained their governance in Mengmeng, Gengma and Menglian and, lastly, the Wa communities, clustered and fragmented, but still actively competing with the Dai chieftain and the Han gentry powers. Most importantly, the Wa mainly acted with the Luohei as their supporters, their partners and their negotiators.

What was the situation of the Wa communities in this process? Before the Luohei's resettlement in the western Mekong River mountains the Meng and Quan administration were maintained by the powerful Dai chieftains of Menglian and Gengma. Inter-marriage between the Dai chieftains and the kings of Masan in the southern Wa lands had been a long standing tradition.<sup>19</sup> Before the Luohei moved in, according to a local oral history recorded in 1954, "these areas belonged to people of (today's) Wa in Ximeng, they were the natives, and inhabited here earlier than any other group. After the Dai moved from the Mengmao area (today's Dehong Dai Autonomous Region and neighboring Shan area in Burma), the king of Masan, whose name was Sange (三戈), married his daughter to the Dai chieftain, so that the Wa shared the Menglian area with his son-in-law, the Dai. After that, the Menglian chieftains extended their lands toward (today's) Shuangjiang area, and they were entailed by the Ming emperors, and presented tributes to Beijing. After that, the Lahu (Luohei) moved into this place and they had their own community heads and built their Buddhist temples, following the teachings of the monks who came from the Jizu Mountain."<sup>20</sup> Another piece of oral history on the west Mekong River bank also mentioned that, "before the Lahu resettled here, some villages were occupied by the Dai, but they were driven away by the Lahu to Sipsongpanna and Burma. Some villagers were the people the Lahu called  $\text{tə}^33 \text{je}^33 \text{bu}^33$ ,<sup>21</sup> which means 'the rude people'. Many of these people were killed by the Lahu. Those who survived thereafter moved to the west, leaving the lands to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "Salt and Revenue in Frontier Formation: State Mobilized Ethnic Politics in the Yunnan-Burma Borderland since the 1720s", *Modern Asian Studies*, forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> "孟连由姚关东南行十九程至其地。又七程至孟良 (Meng Khet)。东为车里(Sipsongpanna), 西为木邦 (Mubang, Hsenwi)。蛮名哈瓦, 慄悍好劫。明正统 (1436-1449) 中始内附。及本朝, 不事勤远, 未与授职。其地募乃银场, 旺盛三十余年, 故汉人络绎而往焉。" in Ni Tui, *The Chronicle of Yunnan* (1846), Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 1992, p. 616; The name of Masan king could be written as Masan(马散) or Mansan (莽三). See also Fu Xiaolou, *The Concise History of Lancang* (1943), Archives of Lancang County, 54-1-230, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> He Yinfen, Zhao Weili and He Gefei, "The Social Economic Investigation on the Lahu in Qianliu, Nanling Districts in Lancang County", in *The Social Historical Investigation on the Lahu*, volume 1, Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 1982, p.55.

<sup>21</sup> The superscript numbers indicate the tones of the Lahu language.

Lahu. After that, people came down from different places and concentrated in this area, following the King Monk (or the Dragon Monk, ໂ<sup>31</sup> di<sup>54</sup> pha<sup>31</sup>). ” Since then, people began to worship the King Monk, during festivals on the fifth day in April and the fifth day in August of lunar calendar, at the temple, in the Donghe area. This area used to be one of the Five Buddha Districts under the leadership of monks and village heads.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the two festivals practiced in the Five Buddha Districts system here were regarded as the specific sign of the Big Vehicle teaching practice, and as such were banned by the Qing officials in interior counties.<sup>23</sup>

In brief, before the Luohei (Lahu) occupied the Mekong’s western bank between Mengmeng and Menglian Dai chieftains, the natives were driven away to the west and the south, but the group the Lahu regarded as “the rude” shrank. It clearly shows that the establishment of Five Buddha Districts not only reorganized the militarized Luohei villages from the 1790s to the 1910s, but also excluded many natives, and clustered them on lands toward the western mountains neighboring the Five Buddha Districts system. This part of the Wa lands was under the control of the Luohei’s E Sha Buddha, and for this reason, Luohei leaders, like the Third Buddha Lord (San Fozu) and Li Tongming, became political controllers of the Ximeng Mountains and were granted titles entitled, by the Qing government. They came to be known as chieftain of the Ximeng Mountain, controlling the Lahu and the Wa here after the fall of the Five Buddha Districts.<sup>24</sup> In general, the Luohei system gave them superiority over the communities in the Wa lands, while many groups were clustered on this land due to the established Five Buddha Districts system.

However, some communities in the Wa land became very active and cooperated with the Luohei, especially during the period from the 1870s to the 1910s, in the northern part of the western Mekong River terrain. According to official archives, when the Five Buddha system arose, some groups on the Wa lands joined the Luohei in 1796, originally mobilized by the monks. When monk Yang Deyuan passed away, his student Zhang Fuguo succeeded to the leadership of Nanzha temple, which was a village near Aishuai, the eastern center of the Wa lands. Another Luohei member, Li Wenming, controlled Mannuo area in the north. He invited Zhang Fuguo to build a new temple at Baka, a locality that controlled the transportation routes of the Mekong River ports, and also threatened the seat town of the Mengmeng chieftain. This movement was supported by the Wa leaders as well, in order to drive away the Dai chieftain at Mengmeng and extend the influence of the Five Buddha Districts toward the area of the

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<sup>22</sup> Yan Sijiu, Xu Bocao and Qi Zeliang, “The Social Investigation on the Lahu at Laba villges in Donghe District in Lancang County”, in *The Social Historical Investigation on the Lahu*, volume 1, Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 1982, p.79.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang Yunsui, “The Zhang Yunsui Reports to the Emperor”, in *Yunnan Historical Material Collection*, Fang ed., Kunming: Yunnan University Press, volume 8, p P.698.

<sup>24</sup> Fang Guoyu, *Field Work Notes on West Yunnan Border Areas (1942)*, Kunming: Yunnan People’s Publishing House, 2008, P.113.

Menglian chieftain in the south.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Zhang Fuguo and other leaders were arrested by Qing officials, and Zhang Fugou was killed in Mianning, in 1813. Later, after the 1830s, the whole mining industry collapsed and conflicts between the Han gentry and the Hui Muslims, known as the Panthay Rebellions, broke out in the mines, lasting from the 1840s to the 1870s.<sup>26</sup>

During this period, leaders of the Five Buddha Districts in the Luohei Mountains were supported by the Dali Muslim Regime, while the Dai chieftain at Gengma, Hang Rongshen, stood with the Han gentry in Mianning. However, the head of the Dai in Mengdong, Hang Enlun, supported by the Wa leaders in Aishuai, controlled Gengma for more than ten years. In this way, leaders based in the Aishuai area had become deeply involved with Five Buddha politics on the Panthay side before the Qing government sent troops to destroy this system in 1887.<sup>27</sup> This triangular relationship between the Aishuai Wa group, the Five Buddha Districts and the Dai chieftains in Gengma and Mengmeng, explains why and how the Wa leaders in the northern Wa lands sustained an alliance with the Five Buddha Districts leaders, from Zhang Fuoguo to his son Zhang Dengfa and his grandson Zhang Shibao, and his successor Zhang Chaowen, from the 1790s to the 1910s. Besides, the kings or chiefs of the northwestern Wa lands, whose power base were the Yonghe, Bannong and Banhong tribes, were also deeply involved in the conflicts between the two Dai chieftains of Mengdong and Gengma. For a very long time, the northern Wa lands leaders were the strongest supporters of the Mengdong chieftain and maintained their alliance with the Luohei leaders in Nanzha and Baka. One reason for this long term relationship was their shared control over important transportation routes west of the Mekong River, until the British colonial power asserted control of upper Burma. When that happened, Qing officials and the Han gentries destroyed their system, after 1887.

Historical change materialized in the west Mekong River mountains area when the Five Buddha Districts were attacked by the Qing army, preparing the ground work for border drawing negotiations and to set a new boundary with British controlled Burma.<sup>28</sup> For about one hundred years, the two bases of the Five Buddha system had been well maintained at Nanzha temple and Baka fortress. Nanzha was more like a religious center while Baka was built as a strong military base. According to the official archive, on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1887, in the lunar calendar, the Qing army launched a general offensive against more than one hundred villages along the mountain side on the western bank of the Mekong. Most villages were Luohei (Lahu), under the system of the

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<sup>25</sup> The Archives of Mengmeng County (1887), in Zhang Chenglong edited, *The Gazetteers of Shuangjiang Autonomous County of the Lahu, the Wa, the Bulang and the Dai*, Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 1995, p. 903.

<sup>26</sup> David G. Atwill, *The Chinese sultanate: Islam, ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in southwest China, 1856-1873*. Stanford University Press. 2005;

<sup>27</sup> The Archives Bureaus of Lincang and Gengma, the Research Center of Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan Nationalities University, "The Selective Official Archives of Mengma Xuanfu Official in the Late Qing", in *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, volume 8, Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2011. P. 57-64; Geng Shen, "The Beginning and End of the Gengma Han Chieftains" in *The Collection of Historical Materials of Gengma*, volume 2, Lincang: Gengma County, 1992. P. 20-25.

<sup>28</sup> Ma Jianxiong, "'Luo Bandits' to 'Lahu Nationality': Ethnic Identity in the Process of Border Formation", *Journal of History and Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp.1-32.

Buddha Districts.<sup>29</sup> The leaders, Zhang Dengfa, his brother Zhang Zhengliang and their military counselor, Yang Dingguo, moved into very solid fortresses around the Baka fortress. These formed the military command center, protected by double thick city walls surrounded by thick thorn fences. The Luohei army had prepared sufficient numbers of warriors and had plenty of food stored inside these fortresses. After 15 days' fighting, the Qing army arrived at the Baka fortress. Because this fortress was built on the mountain side, underground or hidden passageways linked the neighboring four fortresses. Once the Qing army attacked one, the other fortresses were immediately reinforced. Qing soldiers fought for four days storming these four linked camps.

The Qing army used many cannons to blast the thick walls, launching cannon-balls at the fortresses from different directions. Although Luohei warriors fought back with guns and poisonous crossbow arrows, they gradually lost ground and failed to repulse the Qing. At this point, their women and children managed to escape from the fortresses, into the deep valleys in the forest through some hidden back ways. In the evening of 18<sup>th</sup> October, generals Lu Chun and Weichi Dongxiao commanded the soldiers to rush the Baka and nearby camps. In doing so they killed more than 1000 Luohei people. Most importantly, Qing officers seized more than 200 cannons, about 20 tons of cannonballs and 20 cellars full of gunpowder. More than 10,000 villagers surrendered, including the Han and many different ethnic villagers. However, most commanders escaped and hid in the deep valleys and forests. After this occupation, Qing officials and Han gentries implemented new policies concerning farmland measurement, household registration and revenue collection before turning to investigate setting up a border with Burma.<sup>30</sup>

The resistances of the remaining members of the Five Buddha Districts system continued until 1905. Another of Zhang Dengfa's sons, Zhang Chaomin, was one of the leaders who cooperated with a Wa leader based in Aishuai and Sipai Shan, Bao Aimeng. Bao Aimeng, who claimed to be an immortal, easily mobilized Wa and Luohei communities in the mountains to drive away the new Han settlers after 1902. Several thousands Wa-Luohei united warriors came from Aishuai, Muga and Bannai areas and occupied Mengmeng city, before surrounding Gengma city in 1903. Outside Mengma city, the Wa immortal issued a notice to the Dai people: "This year, the world will be different. People need to change the dynasties, and we will have a happy life with enough food and clothes after this change. Our fighting is like the wild fire that burns the ground. We, the Wa people, are taking power."<sup>31</sup> However, the Han gentries in

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<sup>29</sup> About the institution and internal system, see also Ma Jianxiong, "Shaping of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier by Secret Societies Since the End of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Moussons, vol. 17 (2011-1), pp. 65-84.

<sup>30</sup> The Archives of Mengmeng County (1887), in Zhang Chenglong edited, *The Gazetteers of Shuangjiang Autonomous County of the Lahu, the Wa, the Bulang and the Dai*, Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 1995, p. 903; Cen Yuying, *The Cen Yuying Reports to the Emperor (1897)*, volume 3, Nanjing: Guangxi People's Publishing House, 1989, p. 902.

<sup>31</sup> Ma Qingbao, "The War of the Wa Immortal", in *The Collection of Historical Materials of Gengma*, volume 3, Lincang: Gengma County, 1992. P. 35.

Mengmian quickly sent their local garrison to Mengmeng and Gengma and defeated the Wa-Luohei army led by the immortal Bao Aimeng and Zhang Chaowen.<sup>32</sup>

Later, in 1905, negotiations were held between the Han gentry leader, Peng Kun, and the Chieftain of Mengdong, Heang Rongao, with two of his Wa supporters, the kings of Hulu (the Banhong tribe) and the Shaoxing (the Kunma-Manghai-Shaoxing area in the middle east of the Wa lands). They built a new political framework for three parts of the northern Wa lands, including the Banhong, the Kunma-Manhai and the Aishuai. Their taxes were taken by the Han gentry power and the newly established Zhenbian military county (today's Lancang county).<sup>33</sup> After this resistance, most Luohei resettled in southern areas or migrated to Burma. They left their places along the transportation routes to the Mekong River ports to the Wa. Some groups broke away from Aishuai and immediately resettled in the previous Lahu villages in the Nanzha area and the villages along the road to the Mekong River.

The northern Luohei mountains area, neighboring the Wa lands of Aishuai and Banhong, was a core region of military mobilization against the Dai chieftain in Mengmeng and Gengma, as well as the Han base at Mianning. However, the long-term military base surrounding Baka fortress on the bank of the Mekong River was a gate for transportation across the river, and was the passage which linked the salt mine and mining regions. Considering this geographic location, we should not be surprised that the leaders of the Five Buddha system amassed powerful military forces and financial resources to acquire their new-style of weapons and huge store of gunpowder in the 1880s.

Given that these were mountain communities, the question is why and how these local communities became so militarized? They had established a strong alliance between the Luohei and the Wa communities, and maintained their political systems for more than a century on this frontier. The question can be answered by reviewing their relationship with markets and trade resources through their controlled transportation routes across the Wa lands and the Luohei Mountains. These transportation networks that linked the important mines, river ferry ports, salt wells, tea plantations and the cotton cultivation lands in both Yunnan and Burma, were crucial for their militarization and the alliance between communities on Wa lands and the Luohei's Five Buddha Districts.

## **Wa connections with the markets through transportation routes**

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<sup>32</sup> The Archives of Mengmeng County (1887), in Zhang Chenglong edited, *The Gazetteers of Shuangjiang Autonomous County of the Lahu, the Wa, the Bulang and the Dai*, Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 1995, p. 906; Qiu Tinghe, *The Collection of Wuzhuan (1948)*, Lincang: The Lincang Bureau of Culture, 1994, p.45.

<sup>33</sup> The Archives of Mengmeng County (1887), in Zhang Chenglong edited, *The Gazetteers of Shuangjiang Autonomous County of the Lahu, the Wa, the Bulang and the Dai*, Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 1995, p. 907.

In December 2004, I interviewed some elderly villagers in a Wa village, in Wendong township near the Mekong River, a Buddha District before the 1880s. Mr. Tian said, “Because the Han attacked the Wa and burned the Wa’s houses, we resettled here from Aishuai and Aibing, and have been living in this area already for four generations. Now we have more than 7600 villagers including surnames (in Chinese), the Tian’s, the Wei’s, the Li’s, the Bao’s, the Chen’s, and the Zhong’s. When I was in my twenties (he was then 81), we ran our mule caravans for business, especially for salt trade. We traveled seven days to get to the salt wells in Jinggu, and returned in another seven days. We carried hemp (raw material for textiles) there to sell, and carried salt back. From our village, we walked downhill for one day and we arrived at the ferry port on the Mekong River. The next day, we were on the bamboo raft run by some Han boatmen families. There was a Han boatmen village on the river shore. It was easy to ferry caravans across, especially in summer. One bamboo raft could ferry ten mules, driven by three boatmen. Our local market was in Shangyun. According to our parents’ generation, after Han soldiers had over run Shangyun, a Wa came to the market from Mangdeng (in Xuelin) and he killed a Han soldier during a minor dispute, and the one who was killed served under the Han commander, Mr. Luo, in Shangyun. After that, the two parties fought with each other frequently. The Wa in Xuelin often went hunting for the Hans’ and Dai’s heads, but we did business with both sides. Therefore, the Han called the Wa in Xuelin ‘the big Wa’. Stories about our origins said that we are offerings of brothers who came from the Dianchi Lake in Kunming. Because the Han fought with some brothers in a competition for a pretty girl, these brothers left Kunming. The oldest brother went in the direction of Lincang, the second in the direction of Simao, and the third brother towards Aishuai and Mengsheng. The brother at Aishuai became the Wa. We call the Han as *hɔ*<sup>3</sup>, the Dai as *ʃɛ*<sup>31</sup> *mu*<sup>31</sup>, and the Lahu (Luohei) as *mɛ*<sup>35</sup>. Sometimes, we say that the Wa are scared of the Dai, while the Dai are scared of the Lahu, and the Lahu are scared of the Wa. Because each people has their own specific magic power, that means they will send their spirits *ʃi*<sup>33</sup> *nie*<sup>31</sup> to kill other people. Different people have different *ʃi*<sup>33</sup> *nie*<sup>31</sup>, so people will be scared of each other. Actually, people don’t know whose magic is the most fierce.”<sup>34</sup>

According to the archives, basins like Mengmeng and Shangyun used to be important markets for trade between the interior of Yunnan or other provinces and the Burmese side. The most commonly traded goods were salt, cotton, mine products, tea, medicinal herbs and opium after the 1870s. Thus, the localities of the two central temples at Nanzha and Mannuo for the Five Buddha Districts were on the way to two important markets, and were also linked with mines and salt wells through the Mekong River ferry ports. The Baka fortresses were built in the vicinity of the military gate that controlled transportation and markets even though they were on the mountain sides. From another viewpoint, the development of the mining industry deep in the mountains and the transportation system for lucrative commodities were important elements for the development of the Five Buddha system and the cooperation between the Wa lands

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<sup>34</sup> Interviewed with Mr. Wei, and Mr. Tian (who was born 1923), December 24, 2004.

communities with their local markets.. However, in the historical transformations of frontier markets and trade systems, different parties cooperated as different components in a big system. There was even cooperation between the communities on the Wa lands and the Five Buddha system. Later, the Wa separated from Aishuai, Xueling and Wengong communities after the Lahu's resettlement which also functioned in a similar way. The cooperation with the Dai and the Han in Mengdong and Shangyun was sustained, because a division of transportation routes and river ports enabled sharing the same markets at Mengmeng or Shangyun.

In this process, Han businessmen, who had managed the trade system in the much broader markets between Burma and China, were crucial in the formation of cross Mekong River trade. For example, in an official report to the emperor by the Yunnan-Guizhou governor in the 1810s, two brothers, whose surname was Yu, came from Jiangxi province to run a business in Mianning for several years. They came to Shangyun to buy medicinal herbs and cotton in 1805, and stayed for four years. Then, one of them died in Shangyun, while the other lent some money on usury, but returned to Jiangxi hometown for business for a couple of years. He arrived at Shangyun again in 1811, with a lot of capital to buy more goods and receive his old account. Another Han herb doctor, whose surname was Liu, introduced Yu to Zhang Fuguo, the Luohei king of the Five Buddha system based in Nanzha, in the mountains on the western margins of the Shangyun basin. Yu joined Zhang Fuguo and became his personal secretary. In the regions on both sides of the Mekong River, natives regarded Zhang Fuguo and some monks following his teaching as gods. Next year, the Qing army arrested Zhang Fuguo and these people.<sup>35</sup>

Trade in cotton, tea and medical herbs had been a long term, important economic link between Yunnan and Burma.<sup>36</sup> Han businessmen, coming from Jiangxi province, were very active on the frontier. They also extended their network to the mines, or became miners in Ming and Qing dynasties. Cotton was normally transported from northern Burma while tea came from Wa lands or from Luohei villages. But evidence also shows that the hinterland inside the Five Buddha system provided lucrative venues for businesses dealing in Chinese medicinal herbs, cotton going to Jiangxi, and salt, imported from Jinggu area to the Luohei and the Wa lands, being the most profitable commodities.

After the 1850s, the salt wells in Jinggu were long controlled by the rebellious Panthay armies. Meanwhile the revenue from salt sales was based on the official quota system, which was also demolished at that time. Later, the gentries in Mianning controlled the salt business, after the Baka fortresses and the Five Buddha system were destroyed in the 1880s.<sup>37</sup> In the interim, a new high profit business quickly developed on this frontier, the opium trade. A new

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<sup>35</sup> Takeuchi, Fusaji (武内房司), “一九世紀前半、云南南部地域における汉族移住の展开と山地民社会の変容”, in 塚田誠之編, 《中国国境地域の移动と交流》, Shigeyuki Tsukada, 2010, pp. 117-143.

<sup>36</sup> Ma Jianxiong, “Shaping of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier by Secret Societies Since the End of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century”, *Moussons*, vol. 17 (2011-1), pp. 65-84.

<sup>37</sup> Cen Yuying, *The Cen Yujing Reports to the Emperor* (1897), volume 3, Nanjing: Guangxi People's Publishing House, 1989, p. 875.

revenue based on an opium trade tax *lijin* (厘金) became significant after 1887, in the same year the Qing controlled the western Mekong River mountains before the border was drawn.<sup>38</sup> Shangyun was an importation market shared by this basin's Dai, Han businessmen from the interior and local Luohei and Wa villagers. Because it was a market on the network crossing the Mekong River to Jinggu, the Han gentry who controlled the Lincang basins also settled there after the 1880s, while Wa communities, who also approached these markets, followed the old route that linked with the mines toward Burma through Wa lands.<sup>39</sup>

After most Luohei resettled in the southern mountains or in Burma, led by their religious and political leaders such as Zhang Chanwen, their space was re-occupied by Wa communities based in Aishuai, their settlement pattern clustered under pressure of Han gentry power from Mianning. Since then, the Nanzha areas were repopulated by the Wa villagers too, and only a few Luohei remained. These call themselves the remaining Lahu (la<sup>33</sup> xo<sup>11</sup> jui<sup>53</sup>). However, the extension of the Wa of Aishuai community not only allowed them to control the transportation routes between the markets in the basins inhabited by the Dai and the new Han settlers. That extension also enabled them to maintain the tradition of head hunting. Even more importing took place than before the Luohei had left. This system reconfirmed their access channels to market places like Shangyun, and the routes around Shangyun were also under their control. Another Wa community based in Xuelin-Kunma-Manghai in the west joined in the sharing and competition over the Shangyun basin.

According to my Lahu informants in Muga, a valley on the road from Xuelin to Shangyun: “before the new market opened at Muga (the 1920s), people must go to buy slat in Shangyun. The businessmen coming from Jinggu drove cattle to sell to the Wa in the dry season. A bull cost three silver dollars (bankai). Then they bought opium back. The opium poppy was mainly planted in the Wa mountains, but we Lahu also planted it. People sold opium to buy salt and bulls, but some also bought rice if they did not plant rice. People could exchange about five or six *jin* (about 3 kg) opium for a bull, while the salt was divided into small pieces the size of a box of matches. Two boxes of salt could be exchanged for three or four pieces of opium of the same size. The opium poppy, planted on the mountain sides, gave a harvest of about ten *jin* (5 kg) per *mu* (666 m<sup>2</sup>).”<sup>40</sup>

However, my informant also mentioned that, after the E Sha Buddha left, Lahu villages needed to pay tax to the Wa in Xuelin, which was part of a stabilized relationship between several Wa villages in Xuelin and several Lahu villages in Muga. Each village needed to send a pig every year or one water buffalo every two years, to a Wa village, with a certain amount of grain per year. The selected village heads needed to collect the grain and present from each

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. P. 871.

<sup>39</sup> Cen Yuying, *The Cen Yujing Reports to the Emperor* (1897), volume 3, Nanjing: Guangxi People's Publishing House, 1989, p. 924.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Antai, filed notes, 2-11-2005.



family and send them to the Wa villages. In this way, the Wa would not come headhunting in the Lahu villages. Otherwise, the Wa warriors would hunt heads in the spring.<sup>41</sup>

My Wa informants in Zuodu village, in Xuelin, mentioned a similar story. “The Wa here in Xuelin were also based in the center of Aishuai. We have 288 households in this village, with 1123 people. Actually, the Wa in Xuelin and Kunma originally migrated from Ximeng five generations ago. According to our older generations, it was difficult when the communist People’s Liberation Army occupied the Xuelin Mountains. The communists had to exchange their lives. Because our chiefs resisted, we killed some PLA soldiers, and they also killed our two chiefs. There are many villages in Xuelin, but different villages call themselves by different titles. For instance, villagers at Nanpan village will call themselves the Wa, while in Zuodu village, people call themselves the Buru or Burao. However, the Dai call us the Kawa, which means the slave. We hunted Lahu heads sometimes, before the 1950s, but the elderly people said that the Lahu could send their magic ghosts to kill us, because their ghosts have more ferocious magic power than ours. Therefore we were very scared of the Lahu. But, we needed to hunt the Dai’s heads, because (in myth) when we did not have rice seeds in ancient time, the Dai gave us cooked seeds as a trick; this is the reason why we hunt their heads. Otherwise, we could not have a harvest. Normally, Zuodu village always targeted Dai heads from the old village of Shangyun to hunt, and also the Wa in Cangyuan. The Muga valley was the gate of the Wa in the Xuelin mountains, and we have to pass through Muga to go to Shangyun. It is a one-day trip to Shangyuan, and Muga is just on the halfway mark.”<sup>42</sup>

After the Five Buddha Districts system was destroyed in the 1880s, the Wa lands remained an important opium poppy plantation area on the frontier. The remaining Five Buddha leader, the Third Buddha Lord (San Fuzu), withdrew his followers from the Dongzhu Buddha District, in the middle of the Luohei area, to Ximeng. He became the political chief in the Ximeng mountains area, recognized by both the Menglian Dai chieftain and the Qing government which issued him an official title.<sup>43</sup> The Wa lands thus could be identified as Banhong centered, Aishuai centered, Xuelin centered and Ximeng centered in the west, neighboring the Luohei (Lahu). Their inhabitants reshaped their distribution network in order to approach different markets and transportation routes. In the middle and southern Wa lands, the market of Munai was controlled by the Shi chieftain and provided the channel of goods exchange for the Wa tribes in Ximeng, but the basins of Shangyun, Mengmeng and Gengma became reliable markets for the northern and western Wa communities. The Wa tribes needed to buy salt, grain and bulls or water buffalo, and to sell their opium, tea, cotton or herbs. As the Wa communities became more reliant on the markets, their military ability to control trade routes

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Zapo (who was born in 1919), filed notes, 2-11-2005.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Bao at Zuodu, field notes, 2-1-2005.

<sup>43</sup> Yang Kun, “The Social Economic Investigation on the Big Masan in Ximeng”, in Tian Jizhou and Li Yangsong edited, *The Social Historical Investigation on the Wa*, Kunming: Yunnan People’s Publishing House, volume 1, 1983, P. 110; Fang Guoyu, *Field Work Notes on West Yunnan Border Areas (1942)*, Kunming: Yunnan People’s Publishing House, 2008, P.113.

became more important. They also needed to import and consume more and more bulls or water buffaloes in the frequently held communal rituals like the buffalo killing, which could work with the head hunting practices, to keep and promote communal relationships and internal cohesion through many rituals.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, after the 1880s, head hunting was much more important than before for the communities in, for instance, the Xuelin and Ximeng areas. That was the case because people on Wa lands needed to access markets in the basins to exchange their goods, which was guaranteed by their territorial control. Additionally, it was a way to collect tax and reconfirm the relationship between the tax collector and the tax providers. Through these practices, participation in the market and trade systems could be maintained after the Five Buddha Districts system collapsed and many Lahu moved out. Such developments also explain how the style of communal resettlement from Aishuai to the Mekong River, the extension from Xuelin to Shangyun, as well as the resettled Third Buddha Lord in Ximeng and linkages with Munai controlled by the Shi family, were all components in an elaborate mechanism.

The Wa's economic engines depended upon access to markets, and on behalf of such business requirements, population movements, as well as profound ideational changes, materialized during these years. Such shifts occurred in a time of commodities exchange, and involved different types of merchants, after the decline of the mining industry and the failure of the E Sha Buddhas' power in the 1790s. In brief, these historical dynamics fragmented and clustered the Wa communities but also made the Wa lands into a new border. This latter development encouraged their participation in a system essential for maintaining important trading routes and big markets access.

## Mutual perspectives on ethnicities

The making of the Wa and the Lahu into mobilized identities in the formation of a frontier over the last several centuries was a historical process. In Chinese characters, Lahu was written as the Luohei (傣黑),<sup>45</sup> but there were many different titles to describe communities on the Wa lands, such as the Hawa (哈瓦), the Wa or the La (喇).<sup>46</sup> Since 1953, the official title of

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<sup>44</sup> Ma Jianxiong, 'The Three Elders of Frontier Defense': State Agents and the Formation of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier in Late Qing and Early Republic, *Journal of History and Anthropology*, volume 10, no. 1 (April 2012): 87-122.

<sup>45</sup> In local Han dialect, the pronunciation of Luohei is la<sup>53</sup> xɛ<sup>31</sup>, similar with the pronunciation of Lahu la<sup>53</sup> xo<sup>31</sup>, but the former in written Chinese characters was a title of discrimination. According to historical archives, the author uses its original written characters in Chinese, but the usage of Lahu here means that the Lahu called themselves as the la<sup>53</sup> xo<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Chen Wen, *The Jingtai Gazetteers of Pictorial Literature of Yunnan* (1455), Kunming: The Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 2002, P. 341

the Luohei was changed into Lahu in written characters; later the Wa became the official title. However, compared with the Lahu, the Wa communities were segmented through the process of the immigration and resettlement of the Luohei with the rise and fall of the Five Buddha Districts system. These developments foregrounded the construction of the Lahu identity and that identity's reconfirmation in the historical, religious and political mobilization against the Qing state and Han migrants.<sup>47</sup> In other words, when the Lahu became a mobilized and reconfirmed ethnic identity and a politicized ethnicity, the Wa, as one of the Others for the neighboring Lahu, the Dai or the Han, were clustered as a result of such encounters. At the same time, as highly politicized communities, they developed different strategies to approach and share markets, transportation routes and mountain resources with their neighboring communities.

Beyond these elements, another issue concerns cultural constructions and meanings of social practices. These are intertwined with profound human matters such as life values, the meaning of the cosmos and the relevance of religious beliefs imparted by Dai Buddhism or the Five Buddha system, that moved north to south, between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, a comparison between the Wa and Lahu perspectives on the origins of human beings is illuminating.

The Lahu myth, that exists in several versions, regarding their human origins, is relatively similar in different residential areas. In this the Lahu are different from their Wa counterparts, since among the Wa, very diverse versions of such myths of origin exist. There is a text that explains how the Lahu and the Wa came to be separated into two peoples. I recorded this text at Muga. The explanation focuses on different cooking methods and attitudes towards the sacred head.

“After E Sha Buddh created the world and human beings, people lived in a place known as Meng Pa (meaning the place of separations) for quite a long time. One day, people killed a chicken, but they had different ideas about how to cook it. In the discussion, one man said, “I would like to put the killed chicken far away from the fire, to roast it.” This man therefore was the ancestor of the Wa, which means  $va^{31} va^{31} qo^{31} tcha^{54}$ , so the title of  $a^{31} va^{31}$  was given to the Wa; another one claimed that the cooked chicken must be shared with his friends; in the Lahu language, this is sharing with  $o^{31} fo^{54}$ , the friends. Therefore, the title of  $bi^{54} fo^{54}$  was given to the Dai. In addition, the third one claimed to want to roast it until a delicious smell spread, so the title of the Lahu was given; the last one wanted to cook it by using a pan, this was the origin of the Han. After the chicken was cooked, the chicken's head disappeared. The Wa searched for the head for a while, but nobody admitted to being the thief. So the Wa said to the Dai, ‘You took the chicken's head away!’ But the Dai denied the charge, and the Dai swore to the Wa, ‘If I am the thief, please cut off my head!’ In order to find the head, the Wa immediately crowed like a cock and, unfortunately, the chicken head ran out of the Dai's pack! For this reason, the Dai's

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<sup>47</sup> Ma Jianxiong, *From the 'Luo Bandits' to 'the Lahu Nationality': History and Ethnic Identity in the Construction of China's Southwestern Frontier*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2012.

heads should be hunted by the Wa. After that, E Sha Buddha wanted to distribute seeds of power and fortune to people, and so called a meeting. E Sha Buddha changed himself into the image of an ugly, dirty and nude woman, lying down on the road toward E Sha's palace, which would be used to get to the meeting. When the Wa passed by, he scolded, 'so dirty!' then, spitting, he walked away. Then the Dai and the Han came and repeated the same behavior towards this woman. However, when the Lahu passed by, he found this woman and respected her, put her legs together, and kowtowed to her genitals and said, "Oh, it is the place where man comes out!" In this way, E Sha Buddha tested the people's minds, realized that the Lahu was the nicest, then he gave the seeds of power and fortune to the Lahu."

How the Lahu lost their power and their fortune to the Dai and the Han in myth is a long story, but this particular myth explains that the origin of the most important values of the Lahu and the Wa reflects their different attitudes concerning gender. That difference mattered greatly to the E Sha Buddha, who thereby distinguished between the Wa and the Lahu when he made his reward. This central component of their creation myth, reflects significant departures regarding the Self and the Other, between the Wa and the Lahu, and informs how the latter articulate their political and cultural selves.

In the same way, the Wa communities have their different emphases on their values, but have much more diverse versions than the Lahu. The best known text is about the Si Gang cave. After the creative gods created the world, they put human beings in a closed cave, then the cave opened, and the people walked out from this cave. The Wa walked out first, followed by the Han, the Lahu, the Dai and then the San.<sup>48</sup> The myth means to show that the later groups went further away than the ones who walked the ground earlier. I read another version about the origin of human beings recorded in the 1940s in the Wa lands. In this narrative, long ago, there was a dragon living in the dragon pond at Nongqiu (today's Long Tang District in the Wa Special Region on Burma's side). The dragon laid two eggs. Then, a tiger came to incubate these two eggs. Finally, the tiger hatched a man and a woman from the eggs. They got married, and gave birth to sons. The oldest brother was the Wa, the second was the Han, then came the Dai and finally the Lahu. As the oldest brother, the Wa's descendants separated and became kings of tribes on Wa lands. The first was the king of Maleng, the second was Yelie, the third was Gangse, and the fourth was the Molie; all were big tribes in the middle of the Wa lands.<sup>49</sup>

Compared with the Lahu style, the Wa myths were more focused on local, holy localities like caves or ponds, which people could relate to and pinpoint, to show their ideas of point of origin. In so doing, the Wa myths used the metaphor of "brotherhood" to describe ethnic

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<sup>48</sup> Ai Sao, "The Historical Story about Si Gang Lih (1957)", in Tian Jizhou and Li Yangsong edited, *The Social Historical Investigation on the Wa*, volume 2, Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, , 1983, P. 158-200. This idea is different from the explanation about that the Wa regarded themselves as the oldest brother to that they were the last one walked out from the Si Gang cave. See Magnus...

<sup>49</sup> Zhang Shian, "The General of the Undetermined Border Region Between China and Burma", *Lancang Archives*, 154-3-064-089.

differentiation or political systems. While the Lahu myth always described the separation of human beings into ethnic groups at certain places on their migration route, the issue of gender was one of most important factors in articulating ethnic relationships. Based on this framework, the Lahu myth also explains “resources” like mines and salt on the road.<sup>50</sup>

But the Wa myth was differently conceptualized, as in one text recorded in Danjia area. “There was an ugly and dirty woman, her name was Yansi. She was beaten to death by the Wa, but the Dai covered her body with a piece of cloth, so she revived. After she revived, she taught the Dai how to reclaim paddy fields. One day, when everyone, including the Wa, the Dai and the Han, were eating together, the Wa found that Yansi had peed into the cooking pot, so the Wa did not want to eat, but the Han didn’t know, so he ate and said that it was delicious! So the Han has salt.”<sup>51</sup> This myth about the origin of salt enables us to interpret the relationship between the Wa and the Han as a relationship informed by attitudes toward human excreta. What the Wa despised, was of benefit to the Dai and the Han. This myth also helps us rethink the significance of regional mountain silver mine resources, highly valued by the Han as well. The logic about goods exchange was conceived differently by the various cultures, whose values determined how they regarded commodities, like salt, silver, tea, opium and bulls. These cultures also had different gender concepts. For all of them the process of making different goods exchangeable augmented the significance of market access and their routes, but each entity assigned a different cultural meaning to their activities.

## Conclusion

Since the 1880s, the Wa lands have become a new frontier, or a terrain to set up future borders. A virginal land was transformed after the fall of the Five Buddha Districts, an outcome that generated a system of clustered communities, under the pressures of migration and their political movements. When we regard the Wa lands as a place of the Wa, the identity and the political system of the Wa seem misleadingly ancient, made even more so by their mythology. But that veneer of sameness and continuity mask different market linkages, identities, political competitors and religious beliefs. If we review the local history in detail, we can more easily identify the presence at the very least of several sub-lands or communities on the Wa land. One example is the Masan community that maintained close relations with Menglian chieftains and were then controlled by the Lahu’s Third Buddha Lord after the 1880s. Another example is the Xuelin-Kunma-Manghai community, mainly linked with the market in Shangyun. This

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<sup>50</sup> See “The Song of Chasing the Bees” in Liu Huihao edited, *The Collection of Lahu Folk Literature*, Beijing: The Publishing House of Chinese Folk Arts, 1988. P. 160-180.

<sup>51</sup> Tian Jizhou and Chen Jiongguang, “The Social Economic Investigation on Gatuo village in Danjia District, Canyuan County”, in Tian Jizhou and Li Yangsong edited, *The Social Historical Investigation on the Wa*, volume 2, Kunming: Yunnan People’s Publishing House, , 1983. P 52.

community regarded Muga valley as their passage before the 1920s, making their head hunting system significant in maintaining political control of the approach to the markets.

There were also separate communities in the middle of the Wa lands, such as the communities around the Dragon Pond in the middle of the Wa lands. These were closer to the side of the Shan chieftains to the west of the Salween River and its system of transportation routes and markets. That system linked a cross-Mekong and inland line, from deep in the mountains to the salt wells and commercial centers in Jinggu, along with the Aishuai, the previous Nanzha villages and the ferry ports on the Mekong. All these communities were linked with mining areas like in Banhong or Munai far back in history. But only after the fall of the Five Buddha system, or the new border style based on geographic lines determined by British and Qing officials did these patterns become clearer. These communities reshaped their relationships with the change in commodities and the role of merchants in a history of frontier reconstruction.

By looking at the evidence in this way, we can re-examine the distribution of the Wa communities and the process of making Wa a modern ethnic identity that formed a relatively “modern style” of frontier reconstruction, with some changes in the local markets. But, it was not a totally new system, because the migrants and the mobilized Five Buddha Districts system were in the past external forces that clustered natives into relatively segmented communities. Some of the latter opted for the Five Buddha system and resisted the Qing state, while others had once been industrial mining centers. Their past concerns enabled them to fulfill important roles in the market and transportation systems. They thereby linked Burma and the Chinese markets in a very stable and skillful way. They controlled the transportation system, adjusted their strategies of control, and interpreted differently the cultural significance of such commercial exchanges. They were also thereby able to maintain, and when needed, to re-build cultural values that fit frontier transformations caused by two adjacent systems. One was formed by the Qing, the Dai or the Han Chinese in the east, the other was made up of the Shan and the Burmese in the west. In this continuity of commercial flow over the Wa lands, and the commercialization of local products, Wa communities performed a significant role as carriers of goods to market. The Wa were local actors, sometimes cooperators but sometimes also competitors of the Dai, the Lahu and the Han. The latter regarded all the Wa communities as the Other, even if that ‘other’ was informed by evident and very diverse internal differentiations. But, these very same Wa communities were also accepted by communities with different identities, sometimes even sharing their self definitions, while also claiming their Wa identity in a modern frontier system.

### Map of the Yunnan-Burma Frontier between Rivers and Dai Chieftains

