

# The Mule Caravans as Cross-Border Networks: Local Bands and Their Stretch on the Frontier between Yunnan and Burma

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## INTRODUCTION

In Southwest China, a transportation system based on horse (mule) caravan routes had been the infrastructure for networks with Chinese central plains and Southwest Asian counties as well as Tibet and India for a very long time in history. This transportation system provided a multi-layered social and physical mechanism for political, social and economic exchanges and mobility, but it relied seriously on the human-animal relationship, especially on mules, rather than horses, even though it was well known as the horse caravan, *Ma Bang* (马帮), in Chinese. Since the 1990s, studies on “the ancient roads of Tea and Horse” have become a hot topic in Yunnan, with the rapid development of tourism in Northwest Yunnan, such as Lijiang and the Tibetan area in the north of Lijiang. However, the exchange of tea and horses was just a small part of the material exchange between different regions, and the topic of the tea and horse trade and Yunnan-Tibet should not overlook the discussion of transportation and the circulation of goods (Tagliacozzo and Chang, 2011, pp. 37-61; Lee, 2012). Before 1938 when the first modern highway, the famous Burma Road, was constructed between Yunnan and (then) Burma, the transportation system was greatly reliant on animal and human power to cross rugged mountains and rough rivers. We should understand that transportation based on animal power and caravan bands, historically, had been in existence for a very long time. However, because this was a very local system in terms of its internal organisation and traveling style, as well as its skill and knowledge being important social and cultural resources, this knowledge was never well recorded in traditional Chinese scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

Most recent reports and research on caravans focus on the historical change of transportation routes, the post-house system and markets. Wang and Zhang’s research was the first piece of academic work on these issues, and gives a general description and introduction about the horse (mule) caravan system in Yunnan (Wang and Zhang, 1993, p 5). Hu’s subsequent research was more focused on the relationship between the caravan business and the changes of business relations in different areas, especially during the Sino-Japanese war in the 1930s and the 1940s. For questions about local caravan organisation and local communities, Hu’s discussion could not go beyond the previous research of Wang and Zhang (Hu, 1999). After 2000, more scholars discussed issues of the Ancient Tea and Horse Roads (*Chama gudao* 茶马古道) (Li, 2001) but lacking are questions about historical change of individual experiences and communities’ connections along the road. Moreover, they simplified the issue of transportation to the exchange road between tea and horse, and limited the route to that between Yunnan and Tibet. Giersch (2010) points out that, according to William Skinner, China was comprised of nine separate urban systems, each occupying a major region of a county, and each of them, as nine macro-regions, contained core and peripheral areas. Later James Lee argues that migration helped transform the Southwest

macro-region from small and autonomous enclaves into an integrated hierarchy of central and hinterlands. Nevertheless, Giersch (2010) argues that, long-distance travel and mining should be used as cases to challenge the limitation of the core-periphery or macro-regional approach to the Southwest, especially how commercialisation throughout Eastern Eurasia influenced Chinese migration along with merchant and state economic activity. Therefore, long-distance commerce claims a central role in this perspective. The authors want to point out that the local knowledge of caravan muleteers and the band networks and migrations could work together with local communities in a shared transportation and mobility networks, to highlight that, not only Chinese migration and Chinese markets, but also native agency and transportation networking were integrated into a huge system, through which different people could work with each other but also could keep their internal integration in the border crossing movement in history.

Based on our long term field work and data set of life history of muleteers in this research, the authors want to point out a different perspective on caravan study. Considering that mule caravans were seasonally organised by ordinary muleteers on a part-time basis beside their role of agriculturists, the communal ties, such as kinship ties or migrants come from same village over a network across different places in a big terrain need to be seriously checked. Those communal ties would include the links of kinship ties, religious pilgrimages, shared profits among the web sites, that means the places or stations along with transportation routes and commercial centers, shared knowledge and cultural identities and so on. Thus, we will come to understand why caravans' specific organisational features are bound with local culture: the Hui caravan bands, the Bai caravan bands, the Tengyue caravans or the Tibetan caravan bands. Flowing over the social-cultural networks among caravan businessmen, who came from different places, were business partners sharing a common local but network-based system. This is the social feature of these mule caravans in this study and this system had seriously shaped social landscape of Yunnan-Burma frontier.

## **THE REARING AND TRAINING OF MULES**

In the history of Yunnan and southwest China, horses were specific items that ordinary households were on taxed on by the Ming and Qing governments so as to feed the army. Therefore, raising horses as a state-required policy was a core issue in local politics (Wang, 1689). Another interesting case is how the Ming and Qing states used the exchange of tea with horses from Tibet to control Tibet to a certain degree. However, besides the taxation and the exchange of horses as military equipment, horses were rarely used as the animal of choice in long-distance transportation. The animals trained for transportation carriers were normally the mule and ox, rather than the horse (Lui, 2010). The mule is classified under the animal genus of *Equus*, which includes horses, donkeys and mules, but a mule is the offspring of a female horse and a male donkey, a hybrid. The natives in Yunnan believe that mules are more patient, sure-footed, hardy and enjoy longer lives than horses, and they are considered less obstinate, faster, and more intelligent than donkeys. They are easier to train than horses and donkeys and have historically been used for transportation. In the tradition of animal husbandry in Yunnan and during the period of the Nanzhao kingdom (738-937), the Lijiang region in the northwest was famous for horse rearing as can be seen from the Dehua Inscription of Nanzhao (Duan and Zhang, 2000, p.\_\_). In the era of the Dali kingdom, the Southern Song imported war-horses from the Dali kingdom (Fang, 1998, pp.

188 & 244). Besides horse rearing, Yunnan has a long history of donkey rearing as well and was famous for the Yunnan grey donkey species. “There was no donkey in Qian (Guizhou area), but they are numerous in Yunnan. People use it to carry goods to the markets, and those driving animals in daily life are almost donkeys, which occupies seventy to eighty percent. The mules are used in long distance carrying only” (Tan, 1799, p.152). In the history of transportation in Yunnan, donkeys were mainly used for daily and short-distance carrying work, while mules were used in long-distance transportation. “People rear donkeys everywhere in Yunnan; this animal has long ears and its body, with its gray colored skin, is smaller than that of a horse. Normally people use it to carry goods to markets a short distance away. However, mules have very strong bodies and are used for long-distance transportation only, and they can also be found everywhere in Yunnan” (Zhou, 2007, p.50). According to provincial records from the 1920s and 1930s, more than 300 000 horses and 120 000 donkeys were reared during this time, mainly in the northwestern, middle and southern counties (Zhou, 2007, p.50).

After the 1950s, local governments, such as the government of Lijiang prefecture, began to import donkeys from Shanxi province and horses from Xinjiang because their bodies were bigger than the traditional Yunnan horses and grey donkeys. However, these efforts, aimed at improving the quality of the hybrid mule, did not change mule rearing methods at all. In China, the horses reared in Yunnan belong to the family of Southwest horses, and the traditional Yunnan mules used in caravans were hybrids from female Yunnan horses and male Yunnan grey donkeys. These donkeys are still reared in great numbers in many counties such as Yongsheng, in *Xiaoliangshan* (小凉山) region, the Jinsha River valley, and also Xianyun and Nanjian counties in western Yunnan, according to our field work records (Yu, 1767, p.65). For many peasants, to rear one or two animals, like a horse and a mule, as livestock is a basic need for carrying on with everyday life. For the villagers, there is no significant difference in methods of rearing a horse or a mule, in terms of feeding, training and healing. Based on the skills and experiences learned from older generations; both the breeding mare and the male donkey, if they need a mule, must be three years of age. A veterinarian we interviewed explains that, because the mule holds two sets of chromosomes, both the male and female mules could experience estrus, but neither are fertile (Mou, 2014). Traditionally in Yunnan, people categorise the mule of a stallion and a female donkey as *Luoyang* (骡馱), which is also a kind of mule, and based on this category, a male horse is called *Juzima* (驹子马), and a female horse is called *Kema* (骡马). Both the mule Luo and the Luoyang are infertile. However, according to my informants, the male mules must be spayed before they reach three years of age, otherwise the male mules will experience estrus and their temper could become unstable. They also like to skip and might kick people. In the same way, the female mule will also be in estrus. A male mule is called *Luozi* (骡子), but a female mule is called *Keluo* (骡骡). The estrus of mules is normally in a period from the first month to the seventh month of the lunar calendar each year. In the livestock market, the price of a female mule is normally higher than a male mule by about 20%, because a female mule is easier to work with. For most families in northwestern Yunnan, the purpose of rearing a horse is to have mules. The gestation period of a horse lasts about 320 days, or eleven months, after which the mule is born. A horse lives for about fifteen to sixteen years while a mule normally lives about thirty years. However, a mule can be used for carrying things for about seventeen to eighteen years during its lifetime, but its carrying power will decline after that.

In the basins and their surrounding mountains in northwest Yunnan, especially in Lijiang, Heqing and Jianchuan areas, animal husbandry has been a long-term economic

resource for the locals, and this region has had a very long history of being the most important mule-rearing base in southwest China. Mules from this region are sold to places all over Yunnan. The local villagers in these areas are rich in their experience of mule-rearing, mule training and mule veterinary knowledge. According to local informants, until ten years ago, the income from mule production had been their most important economic source, but it has been declining and replaced due to rapidly developing tourism and the changes to transportation and vehicles in recently years.

“Almost all families in our village and this township rear horses and mules. If you have a female horse which gives birth to a mule each year, your life will be just wonderful. The purpose of rearing a horse is to have a mule. When a mule grows up, and if you have an able-minded man in the family, you can use the mule to carry lumber from the surrounding mountains. In my family, we always kept a horse at home, so we could have a baby mule almost every year. Sometimes we bought a baby mule to rear, which guaranteed that we could sell an adult mule at the annual livestock fair at the Temple of Son of Heaven (天子庙会), which happens on the fifth day of the first month of the lunar calendar. We began to rear a baby mule in summer, and sell it at the coming livestock markets in winter once it approached three years of age, no matter that the mule was bought or was borne by our horses. However, to rear a mule is hard work. I got up at six o'clock in the morning to cut grass for them, to search for a good price at the market, to train them. Once it approaches one year in age, it's time to wean it. Two to three months after the weaning, the training is started, until it is three years old” (He, 2014).

## CARAVANS IN YUNNAN

Before the 1940s at the Yunnan-Burma frontier, every year after the rainy season in fall, winter and spring in Yunnan, normally from late September to early June the following year, villagers in basins along the transportation routes in Yunnan, especially in basins in the Dali area in the west, Chuxiong area centrally and Yuxi, Tonghai and Jianshui areas in the south, would organise their caravans for long-distance trade after their harvest. In this sense, they were also a group of seasonal migrants from local communities in Yunnan. A normal caravan was organised with forty to fifty mules, called a “horse band”, but this kind of caravan was organised by big business companies or powerful families. However, because many villagers would also organise their own bands, the size of their caravans was not as large as fifty mules. Small caravans would have about twenty to thirty mules, and would follow the big caravans on their journey, providing security. Those caravans were called “the rigging up bands (拼帮)”. Some families sent their mules join with big caravan bands because their kinship ties or they were friends. As a small part of a big caravan, they called these muleteers and their animals “the joined band (搭伙)”. Usually, a muleteer could take good care of a maximum of four to five mules, considering the long distance and long-term travel. There were many different styles used to take care of mules; some muleteers had the job of driving two or three mules, but also helped the bands to take care of up to three other mules. A muleteer took care of his own carrier-team in a caravan band, which meant he had four or five mules to take care of and this was called “a grasp” (Yiba 一把). “A grasp” therefore was a basic working unit in a caravan. Sometimes, if a caravan was run by big families or business companies, some professional muleteers were hired to manage their grasps. When on the move, some small bands tagged along with on the road. These were called the following caravans (Gen bang 跟帮). According to the oral history of muleteers

collected in the Dali area, we learned that, a mule caravan was temporarily organised for bands travelling on the roads. Once a caravan was organised, a strong mule would be selected as the head mule (Touluo 头骡), followed by the second head and the third head mules (Erluo 二骡, Sanluo 三骡). The head mule walked in front of the band, well ornamented and carried a big, loud sounding, copper bell. The second and third head mules, walking behind the head mule, to which were fastened a circle of eight or sixteen small copper bells, called the disperse bells (Sanling 散铃).

The caravan custom was to carry bowls, chopsticks and cookers using soft bamboo strips. Each mule carried a hemp bag called “the forage bag” (Liao bei, 料背). Every time the caravan took a break or made camp in the evening, the muleteer would make sure that there was enough cut hay mixed with beans, called Kai shao (开稍), in this bag to feed the mule. The food, beans and hay could be bought easily in the villages they passed by. Some individual tools used for shodding, bowls and pans were packed as a small set and added to the pack each time. The caravan travelling to Burma, Kunming, Sichuan or Tibet, normally camped outside the towns and villages on the road, called Kai Liang. The purpose of camping outside the residential villages and towns was to herd mules on the grassland and water them from the pools or streams, allowing the tired animals to recover and have a good rest. At the camp, the caravans set fires, boiled water, cooked, and slept. Camping on a gradual slope helped muleteers and mules to quickly recover from the tiring travel, but they also needed to protect themselves from wild animals. Here, traditional experience was crucial. They needed to put some caoguo (Tsaoko, 草果) or cardamon, which is a popular spice in Yunnan cooking, into the fire. The intense smoke would quickly spread over the mountain slope, and wild animals would be driven away by its pungent spicy odour. Using their rich camp experiences, the muleteers collected some dry oak leaves to use as a carpet, then covered it with a palm mat, and two blankets. The fire pit would be arranged around the sleeping sites such that, protected by the pungent odour of cardamom and smoke, the sleeping sites would be warm, dry, and safe until the following morning. If there was rain, which was uncommon in the dry season of caravan travel, the muleteers could put four to five pack frames together in a row, then set the wood-based packsaddle over the frame, taking one side as their sleeping bed, while the other side of the packsaddle, facing the air, was a space, covered by the palm carpets and rain capes and used to shield sleeping men and the bound goods on the pack frame. It would have been a difficult situation, but it did not happen very often. In the evening at the camp, mules were tethered to an iron stick driven into the ground, which was also used as a frame for cooking over the fire. Some muleteers took turns as guards overnight at the camp, however, as a fundamental principle for caravans, no muleteer was ever allowed to leave their band. All mules slept standing up. If any lay down, this meant that the situation was dangerous. The animal was either ill, or terribly tired, needing to be healed, and this was treated seriously. If the caravan had passed towns or cities and needed to stay at a caravansary, one or two muleteers would be sent ahead to contact the caravansary. This was called “to knock at the inn” (Da dian 打店). Big and professional caravans had specific people appointed to the duties of caravansary manager and investigator. Small caravan bands normally attached themselves to big bands and powerful groups with strong political and economic backgrounds, so that the whole system could cooperate with caravans organised at other places within a large network, and cooperatively transport goods.

Once a mule caravan band was organised, one particular muleteer took on the task of accountant and logistics manager. The original meaning of the head of a caravan, known as the head of cooking (Guotou 锅头), this term was derived from the same term used at the

mines for the logistics manager in this, as the caravan logistics performed crucial role in the history of mining industry in Yunnan. In a caravan, a cooking team was the most basic logistics unit. A team cooking and eating together was therefore called a *guo* (锅), meaning a cooking pan. In a caravan, the drivers of fifty mules was the maximum number forming an eating team, which meant about ten muleteers would be organised into an accounting group in their everyday cooperation and food expenses. The accounting was for one trip only, which began when caravans left home and ended just before the caravans reached home. The caravan accountant had particulars for their costs, which had to be a proportion for each mule, and was called the eating account (吃账). If a caravan was running a collective transportation business, each time they returned, the accountant would calculate their profits as well as their eating account, make clear how much of a profit they had made, and how much bonus they would finally share. If a muleteer was hired to work for a mule owner, the boss had to pay him a salary. Therefore, a muleteer's work was not an easy job. Some foreigners praised the muleteers for their health and strength, and their ability to tolerate danger and a harsh life in the wild, drive their animals across high mountains, take very frequent food shortages and walk a very long way in varying weather, like iron men (Forbes, 1987). In their travels, it was common for them to cross big rivers such as the Mekong, the Salween, the Jinsha (the upper Yangtse River), situations that were extremely dangerous. All the goods packs needed to be moved off and onto the mules' backs at river crossings. This was a heavy duty job, which included moving these packs onto boats or bamboo rafts from the river banks many times a day, before moving the animals across the rivers. Another heavy job involved carrying packs across soft bridges woven in rattan and bamboo. Because these bridges were narrow, the muleteers had to carry one pack at a time while attempting to balance themselves on the soft, woven net. Meanwhile the mules had to be driven across the river. This must have been the hardest work for them. On some of the more arduous roads, the muleteers also needed to carry the packs carefully, while slowly driving the mules.

In general, the transportation routes which linked the cities between Kunming (昆明), Dali (大理), Tengyue (腾越), Yongchang (永昌) and Lijiang (丽江), as the main trunk roads of Southwest China, with Burma and Tibet, had been well maintained by the Ming and the Qing states as the official routes based on the transportation institutions like the nine gates and eighteen stations, which guaranteed the safe flow of travellers and the circulation of goods because the routes like this was protected by the official military force. Therefore, the potential profits for the caravans became competitively low, but the possible profits sought by west Yunnan caravan businessmen frequently shifted to businesses with Burma, Sichuan and Tibet.

## **CARAVAN AS A WAY OF LOCAL POLITICS**

The goods which caravans could move were also conditional on the seasons of production. For instance cotton, special local agricultural products, Chinese medicinal herbs, minerals, and later opium, were all available in different seasons. Beside these combined caravans, some caravans worked for big business companies based on long-term cooperation and credits. This kind of cooperation also operated as a kind of customary law, so that the caravan muleteer communities worked with businessmen and the time of business coincided with the local agricultural cycle, and an annual cultural festival scheduled for to facilitate networking and mobility. In this sense, the caravan travels could be regarded as a way of confirming the relationships within their networks as well. However, these networks and

economic flows were greatly shaped and reshaped by political powers. In order to understand this kind of political networking and its dynamics based on the exchange of goods between Yunnan and Burma, some particular cases are presented.

The first example was the case of the Shihuang mineral (AS<sub>2</sub>S<sub>3</sub>, Orpimentum Orpiment 石磺) produced in the Zhaozhou mountains. At least as late as in the Ming dynasty, this Shihuang mineral had been recorded as a main product exported to Burma, mainly used for medicines and dyes, but mostly used to protect houses from being eaten by termites. After being washed in Shihuang liquid, wooden houses would last longer since the mineral repels termites. Zhaozhou caravans moved Shihuang to Burma to exchange it for cotton which they brought back, and so the cotton textile workshops developed. On their return journey, they also transported tea from the Gengma and Fengqing areas, this network shows the crucial business connections over caravan network between Zhaozhou and Burma. Up to the 1910s, about 1000 tons of Shihuang were transported to Burma. The caravan businessmen bought it locally for thirty silver dollars per ton, but sold it for up to 280 silver dollars at Mandalay. The mining tax from Shihuan had been used to pay schooling fees at Zhaozhou since the Ming dynasty, and the amount had been doubled twice. Between 1856 and 1872, these mines were controlled by the Hui Muslim (Panthay) rebel army, but after that, General Yang Yuke (杨玉科), who was the main military commander, suppressed Du Wenxiu (杜文秀), who led the Panthay rebellion. In this way, these rich mines were controlled by him. Yang Yuke established a Shihuang Mine Company (石磺局) controlled by the Heqing Chamber of Commerce (鹤庆商会) which supported Yang in the wars with the Hui. After the property rights shifted to a Heqing businessmen's group, they quickly cooperated with the businessmen bands that came from Tengyue, that had a good marketing network in Burma, which led to some other big companies, like the *Hongshengxiang* (洪盛祥) run by the Dong family (董耀廷), to monopolise the Shihuang business in Burma. After the 1911 revolution, General Zhao Zhongqi (赵钟奇), a Hui commander from Zhaozhou, became the key official at Tengyue. As a result, the Shihuan mineral transports were also monopolised by caravans coming from Zhaozhou, the home town of General Zhao Zhongqi. For trading Shihuan and cotton alone, about two to three thousands packs needed to be sent via the caravans, per year, and 400 to 500 mules were required. Up to 1930, the *Hongshengxiang* had exported about 1500 tons of Shihuang to Burma and had earned more than 700 000 silver dollars. After 1895, the company imported 3 000 to 5 000 packs of cotton into Yunnan per year (Zhou, 2007, p. 173; Yang, 1996, p. 399). As the most powerful gentry at Zhaozhou, General Zhao's brother was one of the most powerful local men in communal affairs and he himself was also one of the most powerful caravan bosses at Zhaozhou, until 1950, when he was killed by the new communist government (Yang Jiajing, 1996, p. 682; Yang Huairong, 1991, p. 31). Through this, we see that caravan businessmen cooperated closely with state power and local politicians. Without their political background, the caravan businessmen could not have passed through cities and counties easily.

In the same way, another case shows a more dramatic connection between caravan muleteers and high political figures, demonstrating that transportation was not a simple matter in local politics. Ma Caiting was a powerful businessman from Menghua (Weishan today), but he was given the franchise to transport opium from the Wa Mountains after 1935, when there were at least 700 000 *mu* (about 46 000 hectares) for opium poppy plantation. The opium tax had become an official importation income since the 1870s, to support the military forces in Yunnan, but it had been multiplied later because the price of opium increased later. In 1935, the provincial government led by Long Yun banned opium poppy plantations in

most areas, but still allowed the frontier region in the Wa Mountains to keep their opium poppy fields (Qin, 1998, p. 25). Meanwhile, because many Wa tribes practised the custom of headhunting, the official military forces could not get into the Wa lands. The transport of opium produced in this area became the most important resource in producing official and private profits, if businessmen were willing to share the benefits with the provincial government that was controlled by the warlord. After the opium ban ordered in 1935, the market value of opium doubled. The Yunnan government established the Bureau of Special Goods to transport opium, and allowed some of the big companies such as *Yongchangxiang* (永昌祥) and *Maoheng* (茂恒), representing economic supermen in west Yunnan, to share the benefits with the government (Qin, 1998, p. 265). Meanwhile, the Hui businessmen also shared their transport profits with these big businessmen, because the whole Yunnan warlord system was supported by this local political and economic elite. Thus, the Long Yun government allowed Ma Caiting to control caravans to control this opium transport franchise (Ma, 2007, p. 165). The caravans started from Menghua, Zhaozhou and Dali and therefore could share much more business or smuggling profits than others who were not attached to this political elite, but this network was rooted in the construction of a social hierarchy in a long historical context of social changes before and after the Hui rebellions led by Du Wenxiu and the rise of gentry powers in northwest Yunnan, rather than simply an issue of transportation routes or animals.

From another point of view, we also found that because different social communities held different political resources, their caravans could go farther than those caravans coming from different communities who could not access certain political resources. It depended on who the political representatives were for the local economic powers. The connections could be manipulated by local elites to bring about cooperation with higher political authorities; this explains why there were so many different caravan businessmen's groups coming from different political-economic groups, such as the Heqing business band (鹤庆帮), the Tengyue business band (腾越帮), the Menghua business band (蒙化帮), the Xizhou business band (喜洲帮) and Zhaozhou business band (赵州帮) in west Yunnan. Based on this structure, kinship, religious communal networks, same hometown relations and shared business secrets therefore could be shifted to a business credit web. It was the local political elite who introduced their family-run caravan into economic fields. Through their political network, a village in west Yunnan was able to extend its business connections and market credit to Bahmo or Lashio in Upper Burma.

## **CARAVAN AS A WAY TO SET UP SOCIAL BOUNDARIES**

The organisation of mule caravans had been a way to maintain and extend local communal benefit for social groups. The different groupings of caravan bands crossed ethnic or class boundaries before geographic and state boundaries were traversed, but this was based on a local community, common benefit band, like the local term "business bands", of different basins and their radiating ties toward different economic and political resources. Therefore, the regional political-economic elite bands were an important social agent in the forming of Yunnan as China's southeast frontier linked to Burma and Tibet. This social characteristic of the Yunnan-Burma frontier has not been well studied in academic fields. In general, ordinary agriculturalists worked on a part-time basis with their regional social elites as caravan muleteers to organise their political and economic bands. Then, the local caravan



bands cooperated with local elites in business or political transport, such as the fall of Qing dynasty and the rise of local warlords and so on. This modus operandi was a key element which helps us to understand Yunnan-Burma cross-border transport. Local elites could extend their ties to Upper Burma as well as into local political affairs. Therefore, there was a mechanism of “double agency” in Yunnan society, and it worked as a network stretching dynamically in different directions. Based on this “double agency” mechanism in shaping local bands, ordinary muleteers shared some benefits with their local leading elite, but also set their boundaries to exclude anyone who wanted to share these resources with them.

However, a mule caravan was always a provisional organisation. For each journey, its life began when it left home and ended on its return, once the cooking account was settled. In this situation, the caravan’s core aim was to be integrated into a short journey to enhance their own security and to make profit. Thus, the most crucial law for muleteers was an extremely strong integration and organisational principle. The muleteers could be very cooperative and competitive inside and out, so to enforce this law was to set boundaries in their everyday practices during their travel. There are many ways to achieve these purposes. The adoption of signals in a specific language was the most common way to set boundaries. Yao points out that the caravan language and number system functioned as a special way to exclude outsiders (Yao, 2002, pp. 67-75). Among the Hui muslim caravan muleteers, a traditional language of signals was shared with Hui communities only. This signal system could be regarded as a language because it could not be used separately, easily identifying outsiders. The signals were combined with the words from Persian, Arabic and the local Han dialect, used for detecting other groups, to send special information to partners, and in their business negotiations when they had to discuss matters in front of strangers.

Besides signal systems, another way boundaries were set up was the establishment of travel rituals. Caravans coming from different communities practised different rituals and taboos. For the Hui caravans, coming upon a funeral was interpreted as a fortunate event, but eating half-cooked rice indicated misfortune. The most important everyday ritual for them was the choice of eating sites. Eating together was the principal ritual that was linked with their fortunes on the road. The eating sites, called “the double-dragon mouth (摆二龙口)”, had to be selected carefully. At least twice a day, a site was set up so that the travellers could rest and cook lunch, and have dinner in the late afternoon. One or two muleteers took turns to cook, setting up the copper rice pot (*tuoluoguo* 铜锣锅) in the middle of the camp. All muleteers had to be seated in two rows. According to generational hierarchy and age, they had to find their place in the row, in descending order. The two heads represented the head of two dragons, facing the direction of their future travels, while the younger and junior muleteers made up the tails of the double-dragon, the two rows of seats. The rice pot could hold enough rice for a repast of twenty people. Its cover could be turned over and used as a pan to cook vegetables after the rice was cooked. Additionally, the water boiler, the big copper cooker, and its cover, had to be set up in between the two rows of muleteers, as a middle row for cookers. None of the muleteers could change their places, or those of the cookers, during the meal, but they could take the small covers and use them as vessels for rice and vegetables, until the meal was finished. If meat was cooked, it had to be divided equally. Good table manners were a basic requirement as a muleteer, and if anyone violated the prohibition he was fined, the payment of which involved the purchase of a big cock and its preparation for the team. Special language signals, taboos, daily rituals and caravan manners were all practised on the journey to set up boundaries, and they helped to maintain

group integration and safety, and guaranteed everyday management of working order, thereby reducing risks of external threats.

Meanwhile, other dangers and threats which could not be guarded against by good manners and taboos, posed real challenges. Two of the biggest difficulties for the caravans were robbers and diseases. Therefore, the caravan muleteers had to try their best to help each other in order to save themselves. Malaria and some unknown diseases with the symptoms of shivering and chills were called “the shaking disease” (*dabaizi* 打摆子), or the “barbarian places shaking” (*yifang baize* 摆夷方摆子). In the minds of the Yunnanese, the shaking disease was caused by a special “mist” (瘴气), which appeared during certain seasons and at certain places. There are many descriptions of the types of terrible shaking disease mists in Yunnan. For instance, “on the rivers of the Mekong and the Salween, sometimes in phases, the water becomes deep red, changed from its ordinary deep green. If so, the mist appears over the water. Once this mist spreads nobody dares to cross the river. This mist grows in spring, and disappears in late autumn. During this period, grasses on the river banks could also cross each other, followed by rising mists over the grasses, called ‘heads crossing shaking mist’. Especially in May and June, something appears from the Mekong, its color like the frost, lightening like fire, making a sound like the cutting of trees. If anyone is touched by this mist, he immediately dies. Someone says this is the mother of all shaking diseases’ mists, called the river of forbidden water” (Zhou, 2007, p. 559). Through these descriptions, we can imagine how afraid these people were of these diseases and how dangerous the big rivers like the Mekong and the Salween were for the muleteers at that time.

As colleagues, the muleteers cooperated in a temporary cooperative band on a common journey, but their home communities also maintained a tradition of cooperation in their home places. In the same way, they followed the principles of internal cohesion, following a law of equality in terms of risk and responsibility taking, thus relying on one another. The caravan disciplines defined the accounting method for equality in the sharing of food and logistics costs, and their daily eating ritual became a confirmation of the generational hierarchy of rice and equality of meats performed at the daily ritual of the “double dragon”, which meant everything goes smoothly as a dragon. However, as a moving community on a seemingly endless journey, life was risky. Who knew if one would be the next victim after having buried one’s colleague? Thanks to their speedy and nimble adjustments, this “moving community” extended their home ties to faraway places whenever they could. In this way, there was a continual confirmation of Self and Other boundaries premised on death and survival. Therefore, boundaries set by languages, rituals and taboos helped to maintain extended and moving boundaries and protected them in their cross-border business.

## **CARAVANS AND CROSS-BORDER NETWORKING**

The political and economic principles of caravan organisation were based on the communal ties at muleteers’ hometowns as local bands and their extended representatives. Based on what we discussed in the previous sections, another factor that defined their business success was the validity of their network. It was only if the caravan muleteers could transform their hometown political and economic resources into new resources at the target places, could they find trustworthy partners so far away from their hometown. In this way, the muleteers had to find some ties at their destinations, be they marital kinships, friendships, hometown connections, and so on. They had to develop certain relationships in other places

in order to travel there. This is a core issue for our understanding of the cross-boundary movement of Yunnan caravans in Burma as well. In this way, the place of their arrival was also the end of their network. At this point the caravans should shift hands and go to other local political and economic bands which would travel over a different terrain toward another world.

Here, migration becomes important. The caravan networks in cities in west Yunnan and Upper Burma partly overlapped with the networks of seasonal and permanent migration, due to different historical reasons. This also provided an intermarriage network enabling people to look for personal connections in cities and basins, or among different local bands. After the harvest in the autumn, at the beginning of the dry season, unlike caravan muleteers, some villagers who came from relatively poor villages in west and central Yunnan migrated to Burma to be cotton planters in the western plains of the Salween River in the Mubang area, after which the caravan would move the harvested cotton back to Yunnan in spring. Some men came to be miners in the mountain areas on the frontier; most of the skilled construction workers came from the Dali area; and some businessmen came to collect tea and different local products. These traditional seasonal migrants had been very active, especially in Gengma, Mubang, Menglian and almost all the Shan-Dai chieftain areas, and in the Wa lands from as early as the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Following the migrants, businessmen also came to these places and were followed by the caravans. This history highlights again that caravans used be part of local political and economic bands, and functioned with other organisms of the local community bound with different religious, economic, ethnic and political categories of social relations. In this way, a caravan represented a way of communal extension to another place, but the caravan was not the only method of communal extension on the Yunnan-Burma frontier (Ma, 2007, p.51). For instance, caravans come from Dali area were very active on the Burma borders, which was because they had very strong ties with these areas. One reason was that, natives from the Dali area who had been construction craftsmen, such as skillful carpenters and stonemasons, working in Shan-Dai areas in a tradition of long seasonal migration, in Ming and early Qing times: “Most of the Minjia came from Dali and Jichuan areas, they acted like the Han, but were in fact the Yi (at Shunning prefecture). They sing their songs in their own language, but they also go to school, or work as craftsmen building houses and making tools, but their purpose in coming here is simply to make money” (Fan, 2001, p. 168). This document helps us to understand how did these connections establish in history and could be maintained by caravans as one part of these regional networks.

On the frontier of Yunnan and Burma, in the 1930s and the 1940s, the county magistrate needed to manipulate local gangsters, to use gangs as a measure for social control and to share resources and opportunities with his groups. This style of social management on one hand limited the transportation condition, but it also provided different resources for different groups based on their political and economic backgrounds. The sharing of social resources with different groups was reliant on secret societies rather than on governmental institutions which highlighted that, as late as the time when the Qing dynasty was transformed into the Republic, the local powerful families and political elites were the real rulers of local affairs. So, caravan bands and secret societies needed to share a network with each other to connect local powers (Ma, 2012, pp. 87-122). For example, some special binding ties for mule packs were used as signals to show special gangster muleteers their possible protectors when they were on the road when passed by some places, because these places was controlled by these powerful gangsters.<sup>2</sup> This shows us that details about how

local bands cooperated and connected with one another other through networks were crucial practices of inclusion and exclusion.

Besides the connection with the network of local gangs, another more traditional and extreme way of regional cooperation and exclusion was business kidnapping. This could be regarded as another traditional way to deal with resource distribution and to set up the lowest permission for caravan business. It could also be regarded as the custom law of mule caravan transportation. The tripartite relationship between muleteers, robbers and innkeepers shows the mutual inclusion and exclusion between different local bands through caravan transportation. In many instances, especially at ferry-points on the big rivers and transportation gates, the inns provided food for the muleteers and animals. This was the only logistical possibility. Small caravans must follow big ones, and the local communities could extend their networks into the distance so that the flow of goods and cultural exchange became possible, but all of these extensions and exchanges must be based on the strong cohesion of local bands, which could protect their outbound travellers and strengthen their common benefit over a big, cross-border network, but the whole process of this strengthening strategy also required them to set up boundaries to enable them to network. In this way, we could surmise that, even if the roles of robbers, innkeepers and muleteers were in continual flux on the routes, the common benefits to their community bases were clearly defined. The mechanism of communal extension and encounters, in a mobile environment, could be considered in the analysis of goods circulations and cultural exchanges on the frontier.

## CONCLUSION

Local traditional livestock husbandry provided excellent species of mules which could transport heavy loads over long distances. Caravan skills were passed on by older generations. Local Yunnan muleteers shared their very rich knowledge and experience of geography, ethnic groups, language, transport vehicles and methods (Geertz, 1983). All of these formed a valuable pool of local knowledge about caravans but were shared by educated intellectuals, especially Confucian students, based on local history. However, this knowledge and the methods shared were also limited to the communities that owned the caravan, due to it being linked with a measure of access to economic resources. Therefore, it was also exclusive and was regarded as a kind of cultural capital by its owners.

Within the local bands, the cases we discussed have also shown that, the cohesive caravans were based on same community ties in Zhaozhou cases. They may have shared the same religious beliefs, or the collective shield of a certain political power, or they could work for these powers, or they were the equal sites of a big web of kinship or interdependent friends, so that they could share the same benefits and take the same risks when facing the challenges of transportation uncertainties. Therefore, deep trust and partnership could also empower this collective cultural capital through their travels. In this way, the temporary cooking account group was the basic unit in one or two journeys, but, in general, they are from the same group as their reciprocal community. Besides, official and political powers protected their real opportunities of business. Yunnanese caravans flourished because the muleteers were protected and privileges were given by their political elites. Under the shield of local band elites, the fellows of a local band could cross barriers of ethnic and religious communities, linking caravan bosses and muleteers into a more open cohesion which crossed classes, religion and ethnic identities under the framework of local band hierarchy. But, these

kinds of advantages could also have been destroyed by the transformation of leading political powers, such as the replacement of warlords or business interest parties.

The transportation method, therefore, depended on the stretchability of the different levels of a home community. The general reciprocity of muleteers and local economic groups is based on a continuing and cohesive network or membership relationship at home. These networks could then be stretched to other places through methods such as intermarriage, religion, gangsters or special product and marketing benefit ties. However, based on the local climate, ecological and geographic conditions, most of their mobility was based on seasonal cooperation. This seasonal separation also provided time for repair work, animal training and social relationship renewal procedures. This could be described as social and cultural capital accumulation seasons. The depth of social ties in a local band community also guaranteed the depth of the collective confidence in the external, stretched ends of their journeys. Thus, the intensity of caravan networks is also due to the degree of social cohesion in their home communities. The quality of exclusion and inclusion should be two ends of a single path. This kind of characteristic therefore defines the local limitation and cross-border ability of Yunnan mule caravans. In summary, through transportation routes along with local communities, relied on social agency of muleteers, and joined with animal agency of mules contributed by local animal rearing culture, local communities therefore could extend their social economic scope to far away across social and physical boundaries. In this system, a local community was bound with a trans-regional economic network through caravan activities from a micro layer into a macro layer between Yunnan and Burma. Even though, rivalry and cooperation between local bangs were mutually developed in almost all dimensions of politics, cultural and economics connections. In this way, we can understand that the caravan used be a significant social agency in the construction local networks on this borderland.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a data base of caravan muleteer oral history built in west Yunnan from 2002 to 2004. This oral history project was supported by Mr. Philip Chien Yip-bang, Yunnan Normal University, South China Research Center of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The authors presented its previous version at the conference of Mobility and Daily Life: Histories and Possibilities of "Backward" and "Progressive" Means of Transport International Symposium, at Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences on Jan. 5-7, 2012. The authors acknowledge a grant supported by the UGC-AoE Project "The Historical Anthropology of Chinese Society" and RGC/GRF642112.

<sup>2</sup> The use of special pack ties as signals to show the caravan muleteers' gang identity also featured in the stories recounted by Jianxiong Ma's grandfathers about how they travelled in different places.