

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE WOODEN SINEWS OF EMPIRE: FORESTRY, INDIGENOUS ELITES, AND THE
INCORPORATION OF SOUTHEASTERN GUIZHOU, 1726-1949

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

XAVIER SAMUEL CASANOVA ANTE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2025

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an account of how the Qing empire (1644-1911) and their Republican successors incorporated the Qingshui river basin of southeastern Guizhou province and its forest resources. Before the Yongzheng emperor's campaign of incorporation in the early-eighteenth century, indigenous villages only had intermittent contact with state authorities, and the region's forest resources were lightly exploited. Imperial rule was aided by the presence of small native chieftaincies and isolated colonial settlements. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, the political, economic and environmental landscape of the region was transformed. Local and regional elites, who owned and cultivated intensive plantations, sent timber downstream to intermediate markets in large quantities. These elites mobilized indigenous political traditions and texts documenting customary practices relating to the timber industry in appeals to magistrates, securing a sphere that was separated from downstream Han traders and migrants. The villages and towns they inhabited became the new political and economic centers that anchored the region through the turbulence of rebellion, regime change, and globalization in markets for timber. The Qing central state thus managed to secure a region that was fraught with risk for inter-ethnic strife and disorder inimical to its role as a supplier of timber for downstream consumers.

I argue that the conditions seen by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Qingshui river basin were achieved by two means. The first is that Qing magistrates worked with elites who emerged from the timber trade to protect customs and practices that favored indigenous traders and wage workers. These customs and practices created pathways for social and economic mobility, and aided in the retention of surpluses generated from the trade within the region through wage work and profits from arbitrage. Second, magistrates and elites found ways

to incorporate indigenous political traditions, such as the *kuanyue* village alliance, into formal structures of Qing sub-country administration. These hybrid institutions provided a venue for sustained engagement between indigenous political elites and magistrates.

This dissertation builds on a group of primary sources called the Qingshui river documents (*Qingshuijiang wenshu* 清水江文书), which includes thousands of private documents (*minjian wenshu* 民间文书) from household and village collections in the Qingshui river basin of southeastern Guizhou. The vast majority of these documents are buy-and-sale and tenancy contracts related to the timber trade. These documents contain information seen in studies of contracts elsewhere in China, indicating the reasons for sales; the native place of tenants, landlords, buyers and sellers; sale prices; property names and boundaries, and shares sold or promised to tenants. Though there is a formulaic quality to these contracts, with very little information to contextualize any given transaction, they remain useful for making generalizable assessments of forestry in the Qingshui river basin over long periods of time. In this study, these contracts are thus supplemented by smaller numbers of disputes, letters, orders, and stele inscriptions, which are more useful for setting these documents in their wider social, economic and political contexts. I have also consulted relevant documents from the First Historical Archives in Beijing, the Shanghai Municipal Archives, the Tōyō Bunkō and Mitsui Bunkō in Tokyo, and the special collections of the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Washington. These sources enabled this dissertation to study the social and political institutions that helped sustain both forestry and Qing rule, and extend the study's temporal and geographic scope into the inter-war period, and the wider Pacific basin.

This study makes three primary contributions to the existing scholarly literature. First, it attempts to provide both highly textured individual and generalizable descriptions of how the

timber industry worked in practice from a regional standpoint in the Qingshui river basin, through close readings of individual cases and basic statistical analysis of timber contracts. Specifically, it makes contributions to our understanding of the liquidity of timber shares at the village level—where most buyers and sellers actually operated—and the range of returns that was possible for indigenous merchants within the context of the Qingshui river basin’s protected markets. Second, it traces how the timber industry and magistrates worked with customary law and indigenous political traditions to regulate markets in the Qing. Using the large amount of regulatory steles, copies of magistrate’s proclamations, and legal cases that were preserved in the region, this study shows that magistrates operated with significant latitude to protect local economic interests, and worked with local actors to accommodate existing customs and traditions within the formal structures within which they were constrained.

The dissertation begins by accounting for the emergence of these documents. Miao and Dong villages, which previously had limited contact with the Qing state, and little to no literacy in its written language and documentary forms, came to produce and preserve large numbers of contracts, complaints and steles by the late-eighteenth century. These documents emerged from indigenous participation in commercial markets, gradually creating an elite that had the incentives and capacity to interface with Qing magistrates, and circumvent native chieftains as an occasional source of authority. This was accomplished not through active measures by the Qing to educate and acculturate subjects at the village level. State-funded schools did not have the numbers and reach to have an impact at this level. Instead, the new economic elites, who emerged from a period of enclosure and commercialization with large holdings of land, sponsored the establishment and maintenance of private academies. Thus, by the eighteenth century, villages across the region became makers and preservers of all types of documents, from

contracts documenting their purchases of property, to litigation both within the village and at the magistrate's court.

The dissertation then proceeds in chapter three to account for how this group of elites rose. The current literature has not yet made an attempt to understand how such elites were formed, specifically whether their fortunes were made through cultivation, trading, or any of the other avenues available to people involved in the region's timber trade. This dissertation attempts to get a better sense of what economic drivers behind elite formation through two lenses. One is the rate of returns that were available to timberland owners and cultivators. It also tries to get a sense of which market inefficiencies indigenous "mountain" (*shanke* 山客) merchants might be able to exploit to generate arbitrage profits. This chapter finds that returns to timber cultivation were too low to account for the rapid rise of indigenous elites in the region, after one accounts for the various costs, most significantly, the cost for tenant labor. Fundamentally, timber was a slow growing, land intensive crop, for which modest returns had to be spread out over many decades and divided over many stakeholders. Even the extraordinarily high prices of the early-nineteenth century could not turn it into a rapid generator of the large lineage patrimonies of the period. Extraordinary profits were more likely to have come from the uncompetitive markets for stumpage within the borders of the Qingshui river basin. Both anecdotal evidence and general statistical evidence suggest that, in practice, markets for timber shares were difficult to sell in a timely manner, and thus often sold at a discount. Indigenous *shanke* merchants were likely to have been able to take advantage of illiquidity for stumpage, and tap on credit from lenders in brokerage towns in order to make leveraged arbitrage profits. I argue that the extraordinary lineage patrimonies in the region were probably made from the extraordinary profits of this

period—a period marked by rapid elite formation from the commercial timber trade that was never truly replicated again in the region’s history before 1949.

Enclosure and elite consolidation through the purchase of land created pressures, as new classes of households with either no land, or insufficient land to support their subsistence emerged. Chapter four studies the means by which such households were able to supplement their budgets with seasonal wage labor opportunities in the timber export industry. Indigenous households that required these supplementary economic activities served as timber pullers, timber rafters, and timberland tenants. Occasionally, they also confronted these problems with mobility, temporarily moving to settlements where they could obtain short-term agricultural work. These opportunities for wage work, just like the timber trade, were protected by customary arrangements that were defended by Qing magistrates and regional elites. Texts in regulatory steles demonstrate that there was a recognition of a right to subsistence that underlaid the defense of these privileges. Migrants, many of them from neighboring Hunan province, still found a place in the regional economy within these constraints. They found work as petty shopkeepers, traders, and craftsmen, though their social integration within indigenous villages remained difficult. Overall, however, the market for wage work that emerged in the Qingshui river basin ensured that material welfare was broad-based. Households which may have lived a bare subsistence lifestyle in previous generations could now be witnessed in sources consuming and owning goods bought from the market.

As the middle of the eighteenth century approached, however, the period of relative plenty, and large surpluses to divide among the population was slipping. Social order had to be maintained as the clouds of rebellion and banditry loomed, while the Qing’s magistrates had yet to build the institutional tools to retain its control over the countryside. To accomplish this, the

Qing had to turn to indigenous political institutions, with which it had yet to build formal, durable links. Chapter five covers the formation of these links between magistrates and the indigenous political institutions of the region, specifically the *kuanyue* village league tradition, through its accommodation within the more widely known institutions of *baojia* and *tuanlian*. Intensified contact and coordination between the new hybrid *baojia-tuanlian* institutions and the magistrates helped the central state create new and more durable roots in the villages of the Qingshui river basin. While these new hybrid institutions succeeded in holding down the countryside amidst the mid-century rebellions, a high price was paid in lives lost and diminished lineage patrimonies. Despite the promise of greater Qing control at the grassroots, there is evidence to suggest that social order in the region began to fray at this time, with accounts of property insecurity and banditry becoming prominent in the sources.

Finally, we turn to chapter six, which covers the fate of the Qingshui river basin in the early twentieth century. This was a period in which different factors converged and made it possible to integrate the timber markets in the Pacific basin. Excess capacity in American steam shipping and lumber milling in the Pacific northwest region made it economically viable to ship large quantities of pre-processed Douglas fir lumber to China's coastal cities, where a trend towards large-scale, multi-story projects designed by foreign engineers and architects gave a competitive advantage to highly commodified American lumber, available by order in large batches. Writers at the time assigned blame to American lumber for the struggles of the domestic trade for *shanmu*. However, this chapter finds that this extraordinary period of American lumber imports to China was ridden with contradictory trends. While volumes decreased for some markets of the domestic trade, higher prices, and a lively market overall for construction materials gave the timber export trade from Hunan and Guizhou a means to maintain rough continuity with the

Qing, even if production levels may have slipped, and relied more on deeper inland sources. Over this time, indigenous elites suffered, as customary privileges were winnowed away, a more competitive environment for timber trading took shape, and natural disasters struck. Thus while American imports may have struck a blow to the market for domestic timber, this chapter suggests that the economic struggles in Qingshui river basin were regional in nature, with the decline of customary privileges and the less secure environment for life and property making this a more challenging period for securing large surpluses and building new elites from the timber trade.

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Acknowledgements

Finding the right adviser is always a gamble for graduate students. Many things have to come together in making graduate school a productive and enriching experience. Some things you can deduce with a degree of certainty from a department's faculty listing: Knowledge about the historical context you are working with, and the ability to re-frame your work in different contexts you could not possibly conceive of yourself. The rest is impossible to completely divine without having been in the program for some time: Whether or not you have compatible temperaments, or share a basic sensibility about what makes for good history that is worth writing. I consider myself extraordinarily fortunate to have drawn a winning hand from the beginning. Ken Pomeranz was in many ways the ideal adviser for the project that I was trying to do, and for becoming the historian I wanted to be. I could not have asked for more of him. I will always be thankful for his patience in shepherding me and the other historians of my cohort through graduate school, and for giving us the space and gentle encouragement to grow.

I also want to extend my thanks to the two other members of the dissertation committee, from whom I absorbed a great deal over my time here in Chicago. I want to thank Jacob Eyferth, who, through his relentless concern for the structures that envelop everyday life, was able to re-frame problems in ways that never failed to surprise me, in workshops and in classes. Similarly, I want to thank Johanna Ransmeier, who always reminded me to stay grounded with the human and material aspects of my story, and gave some of the most memorable, most useful advice over the course of my graduate career. It takes a village to grow good historians, and here, I was fortunate that we had a good village.

Credit is also due to the people who led me to graduate school from the beginning. My interest in the history of China began with an introductory course on U.S.-China relations under Chen Jian at NYU Shanghai, into which I was drafted for the first semester of my freshman year, in the autumn of 2014. This interest was nurtured by Tansen Sen, Lena Scheen, Joanna Waley-Cohen, and Armin Selbitschka, in the years that followed. They have all been incredibly supportive of my journey so far, and I can only hope to pay things forward.

I received a lot of help as I did fieldwork in China, the United States, and Japan for this project. In my first trip to China since the 2020 pandemic, I was incredibly fortunate to find Xu Xiaoguang in a conference in Guiyang, where, by sheer luck, he was able to introduce me to Zhang Yingqiang, who then in turn introduced me to Wang Zongxun of the Jinping County Archives. I was the beneficiary of the advice and incredible generosity of the scholars at Kaili University, in particular Wu Caimao, Zhang Ming, and Long Zejiang, whose works I have read and admired from afar in the United States. I benefited greatly from access to their library, which has one of the most comprehensive collections on the Qingshui river documents in the world, including some volumes that are difficult to access in print. My thanks also goes to Yuanxie Shi from Chicago's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and her husband Haochi Zhang, not just for their friendship over the years in Chicago, but also for making introductions to scholars in the field on my behalf. I have benefitted greatly from the many conversations we've had, from their company in conferences, and from their gentle encouragement. I owe thanks to the staff of the archives and libraries that I visited: The First Historical Archives in Beijing, Shanghai Municipal Archives, the Shanghai Library, Beijing National Library, the Mitsui Bunkō in Tokyo, the Bancroft Library's Special Collections at the University of California Berkeley, and the Special Collections of the University of Washington in Seattle.

The wider community of scholars at Chicago have helped build and shape this project in different ways. Seminars on environmental history early in my graduate school career with Frederik Jonsson and Dipesh Chakrabarty left an indelible impact on framing and my way of thinking about the environment, economy, and society. Friends and colleagues in the East Asia Trans-regional Histories (EATRH) workshops and different graduate seminars and conferences have given valuable comments on the work at various points: Charlie Argon, Mark Bradley, Bruce Cumings, Xiaoyu Gao, Zhao Fang, Gabriel Groz, Kelly Liu, Ian Miller, Yasser Nasser, Stephanie Painter, Le Vi Pham, Aimee Pizarchik, Niu Teo, Ruiling Xue, Wang You, Tian Yuan, Sharon Zhang, Sue Zhou, Xinyang Zhou. Comments from people working outside my immediate field were incredibly helpful, and gave unique perspectives that were helpful for refining certain aspects of the project. I had in mind the insightful comments from Andrew Jones on taste and craftsmanship at the Berkeley-Stanford humanities conference, from Steven Pincus on state-building and indigenous peoples in the EATRH workshop, and from Luigi Zingales on non-trade barriers at the Stigler Center.

I have been the beneficiary of multiple sources of financial support. My gratitude goes to the Stigler Center at the Booth School of Business, the University of Chicago's Center for International Social Science Research, the Center for History and Economics at Harvard University, and the UChicago Center in Beijing. I was also the recipient, several times over, of what I like to call the "only child fellowship" from my parents, who helped defray the cost of travel to East Asia, especially when flights between the United States and China were circuitous and expensive. My parents—grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and the whole village of people around me—deserve credit for helping make Manila an invaluable forward base from which I

could travel and do research. They deserve equal credit with my friends and colleagues in the academic world for shaping the sensibilities, and the interest in agrarian society and economics. These were the subject of many dinner table conversations and debates—not least about the mahogany and beechwood forests in our home province—that had unknowingly led me towards this point.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the eighteenth century, the Qing empire began a campaign to incorporate the final remains of its territorial frontier at the uppermost reaches of the Yangzi river system in Guizhou, an area that has historically been occupied by the indigenous peoples called the Dong (Kam) and the Miao (Hmong). This expansion unlocked resources for merchants to exploit: Large fir trees grown for hundreds of years in great quantities, to feed the appetite of China's lowland dwellers for timber to build their homes, temples, and bridges. The same expansion confronted the Qing with fresh problems. How can the Qing state govern the indigenous peoples who lived in this territory without the environmental and institutional foundations that helped make Qing administration viable in China proper?

This dissertation studies a key problem in the early modern world: How states governed new environments and peoples as they expanded to their physical limits, and attempted to fill in non-state spaces in the map.¹ As states expanded into these spaces, they ran into environments that were not conducive to their rule, in mountains, deserts, grasslands, and forests, spaces that produced little taxable grain. They encountered peoples with different systems of economic production, traditions of rulership, and ways of life. This study focuses on one such place that the Qing empire consciously labeled as one of its "new frontiers" (*xinjiang*), the Qingshui river basin of southeastern Guizhou, and its indigenous foresters, who built a timber export industry that lasted well into the 20th century.

¹ John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Richard P. Tucker and John F. Richards, eds. *Global Deforestation And The Nineteenth-Century World Economy*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes To Improve The Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Past scholarship suggests that the fate of these frontiers in China's south, largely mountainous and occupied by different "tribal" peoples, was to be overwhelmed by the large-scale migration of Han people, who brought with them their commercial and agricultural ways of life.² Their mountain and forest environments were to be transformed, and with the decline of state capacity to govern and preserve environmental goods, by the nineteenth century, these environments began to generate signs of stress. Disastrous floods came with increased regularity in places like Hunan, and forest-dwelling tigers of south China lost their habitats, disappearing from historical records.³ The newest findings in the literature suggest that these conditions cannot be easily generalized. Places like southeastern Guizhou, together with other highly forested regions in Jiangxi, Anhui, and Fujian, up the mountainous interior off the southeastern coast of China, were able to fend off deforestation. Forests were recognized as enclosed, private properties by the state to be taxed and registered, rather than preserved as open commons that were vulnerable to exploitation by itinerant migrants. Systems for dividing future harvests into shares began to incentivize long-term cultivation for profit by owners. Trading firms that moved between inland forest frontiers and the cities obtained credit, managed transportation, and mediated internal disputes. They closed information asymmetries between different ends of the empire, allowing the long-distance export of timber from deep in the mountains.⁴

² Herold Wiens, *China's March Towards the Tropics*, (Shoe String Press, 1954). On the concept of tribes as historically formed categories, see Morton Fried, "Tribe to State or State to Tribe in Ancient China?," in *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, David N. Keightley, ed. Berkeley: University of California (1983), cited in Leo Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion in the Ming Borderlands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

³ Robert Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Peter C. Perdue, *Exhausting the Earth: State and Peasant in Hunan, 1500-1850*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁴ Meng Zhang, *Timber and Forestry in Qing China: Sustaining the Market*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021); Ian Matthew Miller, *Fir and Empire: The Transformation of Forests in Early Modern China*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

These new arguments were derived from new primary sources, and new methods for processing old primary sources. The past twenty years has seen great advances within China on primary source digitization and transcription. County gazetteers, treatises, and state-produced documents can now be scoured far more efficiently than before for references to specific topics like forestry. New categories of sources, termed “popular sources” (*minjian wenshu*), have also been found, collected, and published in vast quantities over the last few decades in China. Popular sources have allowed historians to peer into activities that rarely caught the attention of literary elites and state actors. Household contract archives, interpersonal dispute settlements, village stone inscriptions, and merchant account books fall into this category. While they have their limitations, their emergence has begun to generate new works on Chinese socio-economic history that incorporate non-state actors.⁵

This dissertation is part of the new wave of historical work that makes use of popular documents in China. It primarily uses contracts stored in the family archives of indigenous peoples in southeastern Guizhou province called the Miao and the Dong, together with commemorative stone carvings, lineage genealogies, and merchant account books. For the final chapter of the dissertation, which extends this study into the twentieth century, I also make use of corporate archives from the United States, research reports from China and Japan, and professional trade journals. While my initial ambition in writing this dissertation was to address the question of how southeastern Guizhou’s forests weathered the enormous pull of demand for timber from the lower Yangzi by delving deeper into reforestation technology and organization,

⁵ Matthew Lowenstein, “Financial Markets in Late Imperial China, 1820-1911,” (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2021); Joel Wing-Lun, “Negotiating Empire on China's Miao Frontier, 1597-1919,” (Ph.D Dissertation, Harvard University, 2022); George Zhijian Qiao, “The Rise Of Shanxi Merchants: Empire, Institutions, And Social Change In Qing China, 1688-1850,” (Ph.D dissertation, Stanford University, 2017); Ruth Rogaski, *Knowing Manchuria: Environments, the Senses, and Natural Knowledge on an Asian Borderland*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022); Zhang, *Timber and Forestry in Qing China*.

and by scraping historical statistics from the vast quantities of forest-related contracts, the sources at hand could not be used for such a project. The information, and especially the statistical data contained in forest contracts was limited and highly context dependent. It was difficult to make any meaning out of them without understanding their wider social context.

It became evident to me, in the process of writing this dissertation, that the value of these sources was not so much in the statistical data, but in the clues about the workings of indigenous society and forest production contained within. That is, what they are able to demonstrate in combination with other local sources is the social context that sustained the forest. These sources lent a very different perspective from the bottom up on historical change. They permitted a dialogic interaction with traditional sources in state archives and publications, and helped paint a much fuller tapestry of social and economic life that would not have been possible with the use of only traditional primary sources. I am by no means the first historian to make use of these sources, in particular the publications of indigenous family archives from southeastern Guizhou, which have been used extensively in two recent works in the Anglophone literature. However, they are the first to use a combined social and economic history of forestry and indigenous society from a regional perspective.

The story that I will tell from these sources is one of the emergence of indigenous elites at the village level who maintained formal and informal economic, cultural and political ties to the Qing, and were sustained by their position in the timber industry. Despite sporadic attempts over time to erase indigenous difference and fully incorporate the Dong and the Miao over time as part of the Qing's state-making efforts in southeastern Guizhou, these elites kept their position as brokers between state and society, and were not fully displaced as mediators until the 20th century. The institutional pillars of indigenous social order—multi-village alliances called

kuanyue, village headmanships, and lineages—changed into forms legible to the central state, while retaining the functions, rituals, and symbols of their older, traditional form, and served as local versions of the Qing multi-faced hydra, able to present a different face to different audiences, that helped smoothen the transition into formal incorporation of southeastern Guizhou.⁶ Han settlers were integrated into lineages and indigenous culture, traveling migrants from Hunan were inserted into the slash-and-burn forest cultivation system, merchant groups and their workers were cordoned out from timber brokerage, purchasing and transport. These were reflections of the power retained by Miao and Dong institutions, and the elites who operated them and served as brokers with the Qing state. It also reflected their financial and cultural dominance in villages, and their political influence in the eyes of local magistrates. The power of local elites and their supporting institutions vis-a-vis the Qing amidst the entrance of short-term migrants, long-term settlers, and downstream merchants with abundant capital and labor to deploy, I argue, was a key factor in keeping southeastern Guizhou's forests from being overwhelmed.

While local officials were cognizant of the importance indigenous elites, scholars in the English language literature, unfamiliar with village-level institutions like the *kuan*, have failed to acknowledge their role maintaining social order in southeastern Guizhou. Commemorative stone carvings, references in contracts, recollections in lineage genealogies, and oral histories document parts of the different roles these local institutions played. They played a regulatory role, protecting forest property, punishing theft, resolving disputes, and even instituting quarantines for traveling livestock merchants to prevent the spread of disease. They provided for

⁶ This image of the multi-headed hydra is borrowed from Evelyn Rawski, who used it to capture the ability of the Qing emperors to present different faces to their different subjects. Rawski, Evelyn S. "Presidential address: Re-envisioning the Qing," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996): 829-850.

popular welfare, building infrastructure like wells and river crossings, and setting up local schools outside the state-sponsored system. They fulfilled the function of local constables and militia, enlisting local men and gathering resources to organize defense amidst the rebellions of the mid-nineteenth century. These pillars of indigenous society maintained a symbiotic relationship with the timber trade and the elites who made their fortunes from them, sustaining their social position, and their capacity to provide public goods. It is no surprise that their declines fed on each other from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, when troubles in the local social and environmental order were compounded by the sudden collapse of the Qing empire, the re-arrangements of local markets, natural disasters, and greater competition as milled timber products began to flow in from Japan and United States.

Themes and Concepts

The core thematic concerns reflected across this dissertation are the interfaces between the Qing imperial enterprise, indigenous peoples, and their agrarian systems, here the glutinous rice and agroforestry based highland agriculture of southeastern Guizhou. Their emergence is the product of a major historical phenomenon in early modern Chinese history that accelerated in the Qing: the expansion of empire into new environments inhabited by different peoples who had loose ties to the Chinese central state.

The Qing drive to incorporate territories and peoples on its frontiers created a need for novel combinations of governance practices. Establishing central rule in these areas could not be done by completely replicating the existing system in China proper, with new magistrates overseeing new administrative units, and appropriating readily accessible tax revenues in new territories. Places like southeastern Guizhou might be described to the contrary as state-hostile spaces when the Qing attempted to incorporate them in the 18th century. Local agriculture did not produce

large surpluses able to feed garrisons, and remained focused on glutinous rice (*nuomi*), supplemented by slash-and-burn agriculture for millet and other coarse grains. Irrigation was based on rain. Transportation was challenging because of the highly mountainous terrain, and rapid, rocky rivers. Settlements were dispersed and split apart from each other by difficult terrain. Inhabitants retained through oral histories a memory of hostility to or avoidance of the imperial state. Indeed the autonym Kam is suggested by some to mean “to conceal” or “to hide.” Perhaps the one state-friendly aspect in the region was the timber industry, which involved moving high volumes of bulky goods through waterways and brokerages: Timber and timber-related goods and services could be easily concentrated, taxed, and distributed to politically favored groups.

Thus we will consider incorporation in more capacious terms that allow us to capture the distinctiveness of the southeastern Guizhou case, as well as those of other frontier areas the Qing empire encountered in the 18th century. We refer here not just to the identity of political institutions between those in southeastern Guizhou and the regular districts and prefectures of the Qing empire, but more broadly to the integration of state and local society into a shared understanding of a common order.⁷ In this way, incorporation might be thought of inclusively enough to include informal and negotiated aspects of incorporation, here in southeastern Guizhou referring to customs in the marketing and transportation of timber, and the acceptance of the multiple roles of headmen and *kuan* leaders as agents of the Qing state.

⁷ Contrast this with Karen Barkey’s definition of incorporation as “integration with...a psychological and symbolic component that indicates that one has become part of the whole. To incorporate means to embody, and in that sense, it is more than just a structural feature. It is cultural and refers in a Weberian sense to the meaning orientations of social actors as well as the meanings that are attributed to actors and actions.” Karen Barkey, *Empire Of Difference: The Ottomans In Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 30.

Indigenous elites at the village level, among them the village headmen and the *kuan*, themselves served as intermediaries between state and society. Unlike the land-holding gentry of Europe who were often subjected to coercion as targets of the state-building drive, they did not have access to flows of resources that could have been valuable to administration in the frontier. However, what they did have that state-builders wanted was the valuable position at the boundary between state and society, the legitimacy they held through leadership of *kuan* or hamlets, and ownership of property, hence the disposal of local resources and labor. Through them, local magistrates could at least conceive of local organization and control.

Control was difficult in practice. In some narrow aspects like appointments and reporting requirements for constabulary headmanships, the Qing magistrates were eventually able to establish some direct control over elites. But in most other aspects of the lives of social elites, from education, education, commerce, and even law, magistrates had at best a distant role as regulator, overseer, or enforcer of last resort, if they had a role at all. Indeed their emergence as a distinct group in southeastern Guizhou's society was to a great extent an unplanned consequence of the commercial forces unleashed with the opening of the Qingshui river in the 1700s. Nevertheless, the elites that did emerge formed durable connections both material and ideological to the Qing, through preferential protections, access to markets, as well as participation in exams and ways of imagining shared origins through literature like genealogies. On these foundations, the coalition between state and indigenous elites were built.

Beyond the elites, the dissertation is also deeply concerned with Qing incorporation at the level of the everyday. In this respect, the project has been liberated from the limiting scope of history written based on state-produced sources by the availability of "popular documents." Through these sources, we can witness in ways that have rarely been seen before in the

historiography how a whole swath of ordinary people on the frontiers who, ordinarily, never find themselves spoken for in primary sources—from timberland owners, to petty traders, loggers, rafters, forest tenants, down to scattered Hunanese immigrants, itinerant shack people, and petty thieves—interfaced with local elites and the Qing empire beyond the frame of grand historical changes. Fragments of what incorporation meant to them, how they lived through and experienced the vicissitudes in local political coalitions and shifts in the trans-regional timber trade, will be brought to light in this dissertation.

Historiographical Contributions

This dissertation contributes to three overlapping fields of historical literature. The first is the field of Chinese environmental history. Like the field of environmental history more generally, environmental historians of China have moved away from writing stories of environmental decline caused by the arrival of markets, population pressure or tragedies of the commons. Instead, the field has seen studies move in very different directions, including studies of natural resources both at land and sea, infrastructure, and agriculture.⁸ Among these works, my dissertation most closely follows David Bello and Jonathan Schlesinger's attempts to write an environmentally-centered history of the Qing empire. Both write about the close ties that Qing rulers made between commodity production and the production imperial spaces, seeking to preserve different indigenous ways of production from being displaced by Han immigration and overexploitation. To this end, the Qing employed large numbers of servants and enlisted tribes to

⁸ Micah S. Muscolino, *Fishing Wars And Environmental Change In Late Imperial And Modern China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); David Bello, *Across Forest, Steppe And Mountain: Environment, Identity And Empire In Qing China's Borderlands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed With Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, And The Natural Fringes Of Qing*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); David Pietz, *The Yellow River: The Problem Of Water In Modern China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

preserve the production of culturally important commodities and ways of life.⁹ David Bello also documents the tensions between Han immigration and adaptation to new environments, and an impulse in the Qing empire to defend indigenous lifeways like herding and foraging on the frontier. In the southwest, however, officials failed to sufficiently transform agriculture, or build the infrastructure to sustain garrisons and administrators with imports of rice and other goods. Faced with disease barriers to fully incorporating the southwest into the centralized administrative structures, he argues that the Qing was compelled to resort to ideology, through the construction of the “civilized tribal” identity for native chieftains to stake its rule.¹⁰

The story told here sets its sights on one corner of the southwestern region of the Qing empire, and re-assesses Bello’s framework for interpreting the dynamic of Qing expansion. The account differs on several key points. Here, the role of malaria, or miasmic vapors in stalling the advance of Qing migrants and agricultural lifeways is considered less important. There is no denying that disease, and the difficult environment of Guizhou, created frictions against incorporation, as many writers have documented in its history, but with regards to the key problems at stake in this dissertation, the entry of mobile capital and labor, the sources do not suggest that it was so formidable a barrier. Migrants—both odd stragglers who acquired short-term tenancies on Miao lands to survive, and more permanent settlers who cultivated land or sold goods, then brought in their relatives over time to form separate villages—survived in numbers over the crossing into Guizhou from Hunan province. Later in the 19th and 20th centuries, outside merchants, laborers and bandits slipped in and out of the ecotone with historic impacts on local society, and disease does not seem to have stopped them.

⁹ See Bello, *Across Forest*, 69-74, 96-100, 116-127 for how the Imperial Household Department (the *neiwufu*) and the Court of Colonial Affairs (the *lifanyuan*) managed the use and allocation of Manchurian foraging spaces and Mongolian pasturelands.

¹⁰ Bello, *Across Forest*, 208.

The role of the state, here viewed through the lens of the indigenous peoples who were supposed to have been subject to its control, rather through the lens of activist officials who wished to change the socio-ecological landscape of the southwest, was different too.¹¹ Local sources expose the extent to which local administration in Liping prefecture was overstretched. Ambitions to manage indigenous agriculture, migrants and ideology appear far-fetched. Instead, the Qing state played a role of a paternalistic regulator, setting up preferential policies for indigenous economic activities, but refraining from any direct management, and delegating the everyday enforcement of these customs upon locals. The same can be said for the Qing's ideological interventions, where they could not even be said to have had a guiding hand. The main barriers to Qing incorporation, and the main protagonists of the historical arc told in this dissertation, are instead the indigenous elites, the institutions of the Miao and the Dong, the practices for growing, moving and trading timber that sustained them, and the customs that they nurtured. The environment, in this view, was not a passive barrier, but an integral part of an interlocking social and environmental system.

This dissertation agrees with certain aspects of how Bello thought of Qing environmental governance over the southwest. From the angle of identity, unlike in the northern frontiers, the concept of who the Miao ought to be, and what their proper place was as environmental subjects of the Qing was indeed more muddled. Unlike for the Mongols or the Manchus, whose lifeways were buttressed by large bureaucracies, the Qing invested much less in the edification of Miao identities, and hence there was a less coherent sense of who they ought to be and what this entailed.

¹¹ In this dissertation, I will be using the term “socio-ecological” as a shorthand for the enmeshed environmental, social and economic system, a descriptor that I argue can be applied to systems other than capitalism. Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, (London: Verso Books, 2015).

On arablism too, as Bello suggests more subtly, Qing officials had to modulate their commitment. Perhaps the main front of this effort in the southwest was the conversion of mobile slash-and-burn agroforestry traditional indigenous agriculture based on glutinous rice (*nuomi*) to fixed agriculture based on non-glutinous rice (*xianmi*) that would make for a more profitable tax base. The barrier to conversion was not just the physical environment—non-glutinous *xianmi* can be successfully cultivated in southeastern Guizhou—but also the persistence of local practice. Magistrates in Liping have not insisted on conversion, nor did they probably have the willingness or ability to impose it by force. Rather than arablism, it seems the more consistent commitment of local officials in southeastern Guizhou was to a capacious concept of “internalization” or *neidihua*, seeking to attach indigenous society to imperial institutions, spreading imperial ideology, and promoting economic activities more like those seen in the interior of commercial markets and rice-based agriculture. By the end of the Qing, it can be argued that “internalization” was a partial success. Policing and militia institutions had come to mirror those in other areas, even as they overlapped with indigenous institutions. Basic literacy in Han characters was widespread, with indigenous elites going further to participate in imperial examinations. Villages were plugged into markets for timber, rice, and other commodities, even as their economies, on the main continued to be based on traditional glutinous rice and agroforestry.

This dissertation attempts to resolve the apparent tension between Qing arablism and impotence in the southwestern environment by proposing an alternative history with which to think about how peoples and environmental lifeways came to be governed. Qing magistrates—the state officials who were closest to conditions on the ground—were extraordinarily adaptable

governors and defenders of the different lifeways they encountered in the empire.¹² They readily applied the repertoire of Qing local government—the establishment of monopolies over trade and brokerage, the taxation of commerce, the *baojia* constabulary system, among others—to rally a district’s inhabitants, especially its elites, into building and maintaining a socio-ecological order that preserved stable imperial rule.¹³ While the specifics of how this concert between empire and locality was assembled in a small corner of the southwest has been discussed in brief above, where Qing rule faced ethnic and environmental challenges to stability of rule, especially in the southern frontier areas of Taiwan, Guangxi, and other scholars working with units at the level of the district and below, the trajectory seen in this corner of southeastern Guizhou may be familiar, and generalizable.¹⁴ The same framework can also be applied to other areas with sharp contentions over resources in China proper.¹⁵ There is a historical element to this pattern of rule. The magistrate’s support for local custom, and the tools he applied changed over time. Collaboration with local elites may exhibit a tendency to intensify, as they did in southeastern Guizhou. But collaboration can also turn into bargaining and confrontation, as magistrates side with growing populations of Han immigrants, or external pressure from merchant interests.¹⁶

¹² This has similarities to the idea brought up by Daniel McMahon that Qing officials can be quite adaptable to local conditions, experimenting ideas, and iterating on them in other places across the empire. See Daniel McMahon, “Qing Reconstruction in the Southern Shaanxi Highlands, 1799–1820: State Perceptions and Plans,” *Late Imperial China* 30.1 (June 2009).

¹³ On regulation and rallying local elites, Richard Lufrano, “Minding the Minders: Overseeing the Brokerage System in Qing China,” *Late Imperial China* 34.1 (2013); Susan Mann, *Local Merchants and the Chinese Bureaucracy, 1750-1950*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ I had in mind the accommodations to the plains aborigines of Taiwan and the various indigenous groups in Guangxi. See John Shepherd, *Statecraft And Political Economy On The Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ See Micah S. Muscolino, *Fishing Wars and Environmental Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009).

¹⁶ The shifts in patterns local collaboration of indigenes can be seen in the Taiwan plains aborigines case, but also in the case of the Red Miao in Hunan, and different ethnic groups in

Thus this account argues for a different framework for understanding environmental governance in early modern China from that implied by the recent works of Meng Zhang and Ian M. Miller, where the state is a *laissez faire* entity, whose main interventions were in the realm of legal protections for property rights, and the principal harmonizing force between the intensive agricultural environments of the interior and the different practices of the frontiers were trans-regional merchants.¹⁷ This is, of course, true to a great extent, and there is much evidence that merchants were able to transmit to the frontiers information about what products were desired elsewhere in the empire, and how much they could be bought for, spurring the organization of production in the frontiers. However, it fails to recognize the role of the imperial state and indigenous elites as stabilizing forces in an area that Qing officials feared for its volatility, always just several generations away from the next agricultural crisis or ethnic rebellion, and bringing the downstream flow of timber to a standstill. As we will see in greater detail through the body chapters of this dissertation, the customary privileges of indigenous elites in southeastern Guizhou may have been small in the grand scheme of Qing commerce, but they were of great consequence locally, as well as regionally. Thus, though its powers at the level of the village level were highly delegated, the Qing state also served a role as defender of local custom and, perhaps unwittingly, a catalyst for the generation of new elites who helped make southeastern Guizhou's role as a supply base for the lower Yangzi's timber needs a politically and environmentally sustainable arrangement.

Yunnan. See Donald Sutton, "Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier in the Eighteenth Century," in Pamela Crossley ed., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); C. Patterson Giersch, "From Subjects to Han: The Rise of Han as Identity in Nineteenth Century Southwest China," in Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stéphane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche eds., *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation and Identity of China's Majority*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Zhang, *Timber and Forestry*; Miller, *Fir and Empire*.

The corollary contribution from this reassessment of the Qing empire's expansion into new environmental frontiers is in the sub-field of Chinese political history, specifically within the current paradigm of the "New Qing History." In contrast to previous scholarship that emphasized the sinocentric cultural assimilation of subject ethnic groups like Mongols, Tibetans, the Miao, and particularly the ruling ethnic group of Manchus as the key explanatory factor behind territorial and administrative success of the Qing, later generations of historians who were trained in Manchu and other languages made use of hitherto underutilized archival sources to re-attribute the success of Qing rule to its flexibility in dealing with new ethnic groups it encountered with expansion, and also its adoption of imperial repertoires from Inner Asia.¹⁸

The findings in this study support some of the key premises of this historical literature. They reject the traditional concentric view of cultural assimilation over the Qing, finding that for officials, indigenes, and ordinary immigrants, the direction of adaptation was often messy and multidirectional. Institutions could and did reify abstract ideas of identity. "Miao" or more broadly "indigenous" identity, complicated by layers of migration and cultural multilingualism, were given a harder edge by the paternalistic efforts to support their livelihoods in the Qing, though these edges softened at the level of everyday practice. Most importantly, the study as a whole shows that the flexibility of the Qing in dealing with the different groups it encountered with its expansion into its frontiers was indeed central to its success in territorial and administrative incorporation, though the emphasis here is placed not on the flexible rulership of the Manchu emperors, but of its local magistrates in dealing with diverse subjects.

The latter point, on the flexibility of relations between subject and magistrate is key. The Qing empire succeeded not only in its Inner Asian conquests, but also in the southwest, where a

¹⁸ For some foundational overviews of the literature, see Joanna Waley-Cohen, "The New Qing History," *Radical History Review* 88.1 (2004): 193-206; Crossley ed., *Empire at the Margins*; Evelyn Rawski, "Reenvisioning the Qing," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (1996).

wide variety of groups were administratively incorporated into the *junxian* structure by violence. Here too was a place that Qing officials consciously labeled a “new territory” (*xinjiang*), which the current paradigm cannot adequately explain. I argue that imperial rule at the grassroots level, and the tools available to district magistrates to govern, were sufficiently flexible for the task of incorporating newly conquered groups, and especially their elites in southeastern Guizhou. Qing ideology at this level also demonstrated a great degree of catholicism that allowed the propagation of moral precepts to co-exist with accommodation for parallel indigenous political, ritual, and cultural practices. Perhaps no image captures this more succinctly than the Zhenyuan prefect, Fang Xian, making a long trek through the deep green mountains of southeastern Guizhou with interpreters in order to participate in indigenous sacrifice rituals typically used to commemorate the formation of village alliances.¹⁹

What I am suggesting is, within certain conditions—where and when the indigenous population is large and capable of mobilizing resources beyond the village level, while state power is diminished by environment, poor transportation, limited tax revenue, and fear of igniting rebellion—the Qing state at the district and prefecture level showed a motivation and capacity to manage difference beyond what it is usually given credit for. As it happened, the Miao and Dong were incorporated in such a fashion as to make them, on the surface at least, institutionally identical to regular districts in the Qing empire. This was not the result of a grand strategy of incorporation, meticulously implemented over centuries, but a bundle of links between indigenous elites, state actors, merchants, and ordinary people, which formed in fits and starts over time. The implication here is that if one turns to the grassroots level, the distinctions between the inclination to differentiate and homogenize as paths to the building of a powerful

¹⁹ See Fang Xian, *Qinding ping Miao jilüe* 欽定平苗紀畧 [hereafter PJML], [Wuchang: Jun xie, 1873], 4a-5a.

state can be unhelpful. Both, I argue, can be readily used to consolidate both state power, and also the power of indigenous elites, an idea that has been suggested before in the literature on historical state formation, but has gone unnoticed.²⁰

Finally, this work also contributes to the wider field of environmental history, where recent literature has moved to once again address questions on the origin and nature of global environmental change at a grand historical scale, inspired by debates in stratigraphy that have identified the recent past as an epochal break from prior planetary conditions. These debates over the timing and mechanism of epochal environmental change have expanded into the humanities and social sciences. Scholars inspired by Wallersteinian world systems theory in particular have come to argue that the epochal break can be found in the emergence of a capitalism that was made possible by a codependence on continuous extraction of value from nature. Alternative narratives—on the role of energy in disciplining labor, the impact of war, and the long-term atmospheric impact of agriculture—have also presented from different angles how humans could have come to generate geological-scale effects on the Earth’s planetary systems.²¹

This dissertation challenges the current literature on the human impact on the Earth’s planetary systems on several fronts. First, it demonstrates that catchment areas for the procurement of natural resources saw an unprecedented expansion in China from the 17th century onwards. This is reflected in the regional story of southeastern Guizhou and the Qingshui

²⁰ See Charles Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” in Charles Tilly and Gabriel Ardant eds., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 24. See also Steve Pincus and Julia Adams, “Imperial States in the Age of Discovery,” in Morgan, Kimberly J., and Ann Shola Orloff, eds. *The Many Hands Of The State: Theorizing Political Authority And Social Control*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 335-336.

²¹ Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016); Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1.1 (2014): 62-69; Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, (London: Verso, 2016).

river valley, but also globally with the geographical expansion of empires, and the intensification of their rule over peoples and environments. Much emphasis has been placed on the primacy of capitalism and fossil fuel based industrialization—mostly centered in Europe—in sparking the period of heightened and growing impact of humans on planetary systems. However, this dissertation unsettles these accounts by showing how a highly commercialized, but still agrarian economy to which we might have trouble assigning the label “capitalist,” through the vast reach of its merchants, and the volume of its consumption, was able to reach deeper into the continental interior to find supplies of timber. The incorporation of southeastern Guizhou, its peoples, and its forests is part of a broader phenomenon we see across the early modern world with the closure of frontiers, and the expansion of territories that fed into different economic systems that relied on maximally exploiting the product of nature.

While this angle of attack on Eurocentric accounts of global environmental degradation is not entirely novel, it adds nuance to the role of the state to older accounts, rejecting the view that “aggrandizing” states who actively and effectively supported settlement played the dominant role that they did, in favor of a more limited view of state power to demolish indigenous power structures and their lifeways. Empires, I suggest, were compelled to make concessions to frontier peoples while the fundamental drivers of improving transportation, growing commercialization, and expanding population weighed on frontier environments and societies over the long term. Viewed from the frontier backwards, the expansionary early modern state in this account appears less an all-conquering force, and more a careful, plodding consolidator, compelled to work with frontier society to manage the impact of expanded markets and migration in the interest of stability. Clearly this is not the only story of the expansionary state in the early modern period, and more thorough extractive projects have been successful—the rapacious extraction of

resources from colonies in places such as the Caribbean need not be re-told here. But it presents a different path to the closure of global frontiers and the intensification of the exploitation of natural resources that is perhaps more fitting for other largely agrarian empires that stood alongside the Qing, such as the Mughals, the Russian, and the Ottomans.²²

As the dissertation moves into the 20th century, and the market for China's timber expands further from the arrival of steamships, it brings in two further contributions to the broader environmental history literature. By following the imports of foreign timber into China's coastal cities, most notably from North America, Southeast Asia, and Japan, this dissertation uncovers an often overlooked history of large scale resource exchange, specifically of raw materials from developed countries to what is sometimes called "the global south"—a pattern that does not fit neatly into paradigms of dependency. Old growth forests in the United States's Pacific northwest states of Washington and Oregon, as well as in the Canadian province of British Columbia, were mined for softwoods like Douglas Fir, mostly sent off to the beating heart of an emerging capitalist system in China, centered in the city of Shanghai and its burgeoning middle class, to build the homes, factories, ports, shopping centers, and colleges that marked a new era of production and consumption. Hence, rather than a neat schema of a global division of labor between metropolises that retain surplus value, and peripheries or semi-peripheries that serve as sites of extraction for labor and natural resources, we see a more fractured world of multi-polar capitalism that draws on resources even from areas that were ostensibly part of the metropole to feed the metabolism of their economies.²³ The polemical fixation on European capitalism in the

²² See for example Pratyay Nath, *Climate of Conquest: War, Environment, and Empire in Mughal North India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making Of A Colonial Empire, 1500-1800*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Mikhail, Alan, *Nature And Empire In Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²³ Jason Moore, "'The Modern World-System' as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism," *Theory and Society* 32.3 (2003): 307-377; Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of*

past decade of research on the anthropocene has only served to occlude the large role that the rest of the world has played—and continues to play—in systemically generating environmental change. These works do not correspond to the now substantial body of research that has questioned the triumphant Eurocentric accounts of economic history, by showing that gaps in living standards were not as large as once thought, and that rough convergence in terms of environmental impact had continuities that reach back into the early 20th and late 19th centuries.

The Setting and Overview of the Dissertation

This study covers the region that is referred to as the lower and middle reaches of the Qingshui river basin (*Qingshuijiang liuyu zhongyou/xiayou*) in Guizhou province. This region extends west to the confluence of the Chong'an and Mawei rivers, close to Kaili, the contemporary capital of the Southeastern Guizhou Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture. It ends in Tuokou village, Hunan, close to Qianyang city, where the Qingshui and Qu rivers converge into the Yuan river.²⁴ For this dissertation, however, the focus will be on a sub-region within the broader Qingshui river basin that is especially known for its historical involvement in timber production and trade, roughly coterminous with present-day Jinping county, and for most of the Qing falling under Liping prefecture. Within this sub-region, special attention will be given to five study hamlets from different parts of the basin for which we have access to more abundant sources, namely the hamlets of Wendou, Jiachi, Yaoguang, Maoping, and Kuidan.

The Qingshui river basin is located in the upper reaches of the Yangzi river basin, upstream from the major port cities of Hankou and Changde. The area is mountainous and difficult to pass. Yellow, followed by red soils are dominant in the region, and together with a mild, frost-free

Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital, (London: Verso, 2015); *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

²⁴ Li Bin, *Qingdai Qingshuijiang liuyu shehui bianqian yanjiu*, (Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 2016), 19-20.

climate and low levels of annual sunshine, make it a suitable place for China fir cultivation, especially in contrast to the rest of Guizhou.²⁵ Not much of the land can be used for intensive cultivation of rice, and the few flatlands for which such cultivation is viable are highly valued. Historically, both transportation and agriculture have been fundamental challenges to governing the area. As a result the region is not as densely populated as the rest of China. By the time of the 1953 census, the heart of this region in Jinping county had a population of 94,560 dispersed over 1,591 square kilometers of land. Of these 37,690 were identified as part of the Dong ethnicity, 22,534 as Miao, and 33,193 as Han.²⁶ The broader region of southeastern Guizhou is disproportionately important to forestry despite its size, accounting for half the provincial standing timber stock, and production in the Republic.²⁷

The narrative is bookended by two events that roughly coincide with the emergence and disappearance of the popular sources that form the foundation of this dissertation: The campaign of Yun-Gui governor general E'ertai to conquer and incorporate southeastern Guizhou into the Qing empire in 1726, and 1950, when the Red Army of the People's Republic of China arrived in Jinping county, paving the way for land reform by 1951, and the complete collectivization of forests by 1958.²⁸ As we will see, much changed in the over two centuries that elapsed between these two years, but fundamentally, this was also a period of continuity, in which we saw a commercial forest system based on private ownership of timberland plots.

²⁵ Long Dixin, *Jinping Linye Zhi* 锦屏林业志 [hereafter JPLZ], (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2002), 44-52.

²⁶ Guizhou sheng bianji zu, *Dongzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha* 侗族社会历史调查 [hereafter DSLD], (Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 1988), 1.

²⁷ See Ding Daoqian, *Guizhou jingji dili* 贵州经济地理, (Chongqing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1946), 411-425; Liao Yaonan, "Qingshuijiang liuyu de shanmu jiaoyi 清水江流域的杉木交易" in *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Guizhou sheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui ed., Guizhou wenshi ziliao xuanji* 贵州文史资料选辑 [hereafter GWZX], vol. 6, (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1963-), 1-35.

²⁸ JPLZ, 76-88.

The conjoined topic of frontier expansion and natural resources can be studied from many possible geographies and periods in China. However, I contend that southeastern Guizhou from the 18th to the 20th centuries is ideally situated because of its location at the physical fringes of the Yangzi river system, its large indigenous population, and its temporal position in a time of unprecedented growth in population and commerce. I cannot think of many places and times that could capture the problem of early modern frontier expansion and forestry in a single case study, much less with the same richness of local sources which we have been fortunate to have. These conditions allow for an intensive local angle to this problem, in contrast to the more macrohistorical, or trans-regional approaches that multiple scholars have used over the years.

The dissertation's chapters are organized in rough chronological order, but were written primarily with the idea of accounting for major historical changes in southeastern Guizhou, in particular the rise of indigenous broker elites, the emergence of timber industry related wage labor, the envelopment of indigenous political structures into Qing central institutions, the decline of public order in the Republic, and the globalization of timber markets in China's coastal areas. The narrative arc of this dissertation, if one must find a thread to follow across time, rests on the fate of the indigenous village elites, whose history might be said to reflect upon the state of the forests which they owned, managed, and traded. But as their story is not always continuous, and would at best give us a partial account, the chapters also tell the stories of tenant foresters, immigrants, rafters, and rivals for supremacy in the timber markets. Together with the indigenous elites, they give us a fuller picture of southeastern Guizhou's political economy, and how they combined to make commercial forestry possible over the course of more than two centuries.

The first chapter addresses a basic question on the origins of the popular documents which constitute the foundation of this dissertation. When and how did they start to be produced in southeastern Guizhou? The answer was not an imperial imposition of property forms, documentation, and Confucian education. There is little to suggest that such efforts bore any meaning for most people who inhabited the countryside, including its elites. The production of these documents instead can be tied to the emergence of intermediaries between the village and the Qing government at the level of the magistrate who were versed in Qing documentary forms, and often engaged in commerce relating to the timber trade. The Qing developmentalist push to improve the Qingshui river and promote commercial activity was certainly important to the production of these sources, however, this chapter shows that their production was just as much a bottom-up phenomenon. By the end of the 18th century, even small villages at the peripheries of the regional market had developed a capacity to engage with the bottom level of Qing administration and produce documents that were legible to the magistrates in its courts.

The second chapter proceeds by attempting to account for the meteoric rise of indigenous elites into positions as large landowners who had the financial capacity to spend on lavish homes, Confucian educations, public infrastructure, and local militias by the mid-nineteenth century. Harkening back to an old question in the historiography of elite formation in China, it is argued in this chapter that agriculture, and in particular forestry were unlikely to have been the powerful drivers that propelled indigenous elites to the levels they reached by mid century. Examining the forestry contracts in household collections, it seems that the income generated in regenerative forestry was simply far too low relative to the levels of investment it required. The rise of indigenous elites was more likely to have been generated by gains from trading timber, which placed them at an intermediary position between monopoly brokerages that restricted

access by outsider merchants, and sellers of timber at the stump. Returns from these activities were much higher, and enabled households to advance themselves into a new place as educated landowners in the space of a few generations.

The third chapter attends to a parallel process alongside elite formation: The emergence of wage labor as a source of livelihood for those who lost out amidst the enclosure and concentration of forest and agricultural land in the hands of elites. A bird's eye view of the regional timber trade and its components, from costs of brokerage, transportation, stumpage, as well as profits accrued to merchants, suggests that the industry indeed created a large source of seasonal employment for people across the region, especially in the winter slack season. It can be said that the timber industry created backflows that benefitted indigenous households and spurred commercialization, and was not an outright extractive operation that brought in outside labor gangs to mow through the forest at a rapid pace. Neither did it produce outright proletarianization of large masses of the rural indigenous population. Employment as loggers, haulers, tree planters, and rafters functioned mainly as supplements to household income, and indeed saw broad participation across society, even among the relatively well off. This chapter thus shows how the timber industry became a lynchpin for regional order beyond elite formation, and created additional fronts on which local magistrates protected local privileges.

The fourth chapter brings us to the greatest trial of the coalition between indigenous elites, indigenous villagers, and the Qing empire: The rebellions of the mid-nineteenth century, the slow decline then sudden collapse of markets for timber, and the rise of disorder in southeastern Guizhou. An especially skilled and active magistrate of Liping prefecture named Hu Linyi, amidst the tremors of rebellion in the empire and economic malaise, attempted to complete a long standing but still unfulfilled ambition of the Qing empire in incorporating southeastern

Guizhou, the establishment of mutual surveillance organizations called *baojia*. His vision was implemented as a variation on the institution that violated norms elsewhere in the empire. The gentry were conscripted into its leadership, indigenous political institutions like the *kuan* were knowingly assimilated into its functions, and it was combined with the otherwise separate institution of local militia, or *tuanlian*. The result was a hybrid constabulary institution that can be called *baojia-tuanlian*, that also incorporated indigenous elites and political forms under its label. Local elites and their fellow villagers stood with the Qing as Miao and Dong rebels from neighboring territories encroached into Liping, but they paid a heavy price in blood and treasure.

The fifth and final body chapter brings us into the twentieth century, which brings with it two major historical changes. First is the decline and formal demise of Qing-era brokerage privileges and barriers to market entry in southeastern Guizhou, as China adopts a new republican government in 1912. The second is the globalization of the timber market in China, as cheap transportation on steamships allowed lumber from the United States, Japan, and Canada to outcompete domestic products, including the timber of southeastern Guizhou, in the markets of Shanghai and other coastal cities. These changes did not strike a mortal blow to timber production in southeastern Guizhou, and indeed there was a decline, but not a collapse in production and trade until the full-blown commencement of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. However, the reshuffling of the local order and new entrants to different areas of the timber market did not create prosperous times for indigenous elites, who were bled out by the burdens of disaster and disorder, and obtained few fresh opportunities for enrichment and advancement as they did during the glorious decades of the timber market in the early nineteenth century.

The dissertation concludes, as I will here in the introduction, by returning to the core inquiries that drove this study forward from the beginning, then re-situating them under the light

of the study's findings and broader fields of inquiry. This dissertation puts the early modern frontier environment and society under the microscope, allowing us to look at dynamics down to the regional and local level in unusual detail. As other scholars of indigenous histories have found, it is not always the case that flows of capital and people inevitably overwhelm indigenous society, as was the case here. But neither was southeastern Guizhou a Scottian escape zone, despite having the right ingredients for resisting the state. The partial permeability of this region despite its incorporation makes it an interesting point of comparison for other resource extraction zones across the early modern world economy, to see how processes and outcomes differed or shared similarities with the tropical islands, coastal forests, and inland mines that powered the long prelude to the great acceleration in human production and consumption in the 20th century.

CHAPTER 2: LAND ENCLOSURE AND THE EMERGENCE OF WRITTEN CONTRACTS IN THE QINGSHUI RIVER BASIN

Introduction

The written history of the timber industry in the Qingshui river basin can be traced back to the contracts, complaints, and steles that were produced in numbers beginning in the early eighteenth century. How these documents became commonplace in the region is the main topic of this chapter. Any notion that the use of written contracts, together with the adoption of accompanying practices like land enclosure, patrilineal lineages, genealogy compilation, or participation in trans-regional markets, were somehow the inexorable outcomes of the Chinese empire's expansion over time and across space can be dispelled by the many studies now available showing how incorporation was a drawn-out, conflict-ridden process with variegated, far from pre-ordained outcomes.²⁹

The use of forest-related contracts, steles, and complaints in the Qingshui river basin emerged from processes that unfolded over different temporalities. These documents came about from slow, structural changes in the region's demography and involvement in the Qing commercial economy. They also came about from short-term changes initiated by both indigenous actors and various agents of the Qing dynasty.

²⁹ For a sampling of the literature on different frontiers in China, see David Bello, *Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain: Environment, Identity and Empire in Qing China's Borderlands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); C. Patterson Giersch, *Corporate Conquests: Business, the State, and the Origins of Ethnic Inequality in Southwest China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Kwangmin Kim, *Borderland Capitalism: Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); John Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); John Herman, "Collaboration and Resistance on the Southwest Frontier: Early Eighteenth-Century Qing Expansion on Two Fronts," *Late Imperial China* 35.1 (2014): 77-112.

In this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate how forest-related documents in Qingshui river basin villages from the early eighteenth century onwards were linked to the rise of new intermediary elites who were successfully able to deploy their accumulated economic and cultural capital to re-arrange the local political order. The native chieftaincies, already in a precarious position against villages and village alliances, became increasingly marginalized from the tasks of governance. Immigration, mutual acculturation, education in Han script, market participation through the timber-silver trade, forest enclosure, technological diffusion, and rivalries along different axes developed the capacity of indigenous political formations to further challenge the native chieftaincies and serve as direct units for interfacing with the imperial state. Over the course of many otherwise unremarkable clashes between native chieftains, indigenous elites, and Qing official authority in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the native chieftaincies were gradually disintermediated, and fell into irrelevance by the nineteenth century. In their place stood indigenous village elites with growing stocks of land, skills, and silver, who moved about in circuits of trade and administration as they bought and sold timber, and dealt with new disputes arising from commercialization and land enclosure.

The chapter will begin with an idealized schematic of political power in the Qingshui river basin of southeastern Guizhou circa the Kangxi and Yongzheng reigns. I will then proceed by going through the parallel developments that further undermined the native chieftaincy, leading to their gradual disintermediation and the direct subordination of indigenous hamlets to the Qing. The first set of developments changed the capacity of indigenous villagers to interact with the Qing state. Indigenous villagers became fluent in deploying the literary and documentary forms of the empire through the absorption of new migrants into indigenous society, and private schooling. The second set of developments represents a larger trend of growing market

participation, and shifting economic power. Top-down initiatives from Qing officials like the dredging of the Qingshui river and the establishment of ethnically-segmented markets were central to this development. So was the bottom-up initiative to cultivate and protect timber, together with its movement and commoditization in the Qingshui river basin. The final substantive section of this chapter will then go over two cases that represent the local conflicts that were emerging from the growing capacity of indigenous elites to circumvent the native chieftains in protecting their own interests.

The Political and Economic Landscape Before *Gaitu Guiliu*: The Native Chieftaincy, the Village, and the Kuanyue Alliances

Guizhou was integrated and administered as a province in the Ming dynasty. However, administration within the boundaries of the province was more complex. Some areas were administered through institutions of indirect rule called the native chieftaincies (*tusi*), which first emerged in the Yuan dynasty as a tool to exert control over non-Han indigenous groups on its frontiers.³⁰ In the Qingshui river basin of southeastern Guizhou, many native chieftaincies were established at various points in the Yuan and the Ming, which served as the main agents of imperial control in the area by the time of the Qing dynasty.³¹

³⁰ For introductory accounts on the native chieftaincy in the English language literature, see Jennifer Took, *A Native Chieftaincy in Southwest China: Franchising a Tai Chieftaincy Under the Tusi System of Late Imperial China*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005); John Herman, "Empire in the Southwest: Early Qing Reforms For the Native Chieftain System," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 47–74; Herold Wiens, *China's March Towards the Tropics* (Shoe String Press, 1954).

³¹ Cong Gao and Hongpei Tan, *Guizhou Qingshuijiang Liuyu Ming Qing Tusi Qiyue Wenshu: Jiunan Pian* 贵州清水健流域明清土司契约文书: 九南篇, (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2013), 9-10. Namely, these are Yongcong 永从, Tanxi 潭溪, Hongzhouboli 洪州泊里, Tonggu 铜鼓, Hu'er 湖耳, Liangzhai 亮寨, Ouyang 欧阳, Xinhua 新化, Chixinandong 赤溪南洞, Zhonglinyandong 中林验洞, Longli 龙里, Bazhou 八舟, Caozhe 曹谿, Guzoubawan 古州八万, Chengzhou fuying 诚州富盈. Some of these native chieftaincies were abolished or modified in the course of the Qing period. All of them were hereditary posts. See also Takeuchi Fusaji 武内房司, "Narukami to narukan no aida: Shindai Kishū Byōzoku ringyō keiyaku bunsho ni mieru Byōzoku no shūzoku to funsō shori 鳴神と鳴官のあいだ: 清代貴州苗族林業契約文

The native chieftains functioned as the equivalent of district magistrates in the region. They had jurisdiction on legal matters, and were responsible for tax collection. Most importantly to Qing officials, they could call upon the native chieftaincies as agents of coercion. The native chieftaincies were crucial for the putting down of the Yongzheng-Qianlong Miao rebellions, and helped strengthen their position as supplementary institutions for the Liping magistrate in the rebellion's aftermath.³²

Economically, the native chieftains of southeastern Guizhou were maintained by lands held under the chieftain and his lineage, not feudal manors.³³ Many of the native chieftaincies were established in places endowed with more arable land than the surrounding region, in particular the flatland environments (*pingba*), typically deeper inland, that interrupted the steep and mountainous terrain. Native chieftains were not compelled to squeeze whatever they could from the mountain lands, like the indigenous hamlets had to do. Even a quick sweep through their contract holdings making it clear that local production was more diversified than it was in a heavily mountainous village like Wendou, where a small number of paddy fields had to be supplemented by common-field slash and burn agriculture or commercial crops.³⁴ However, they

書に見える苗族の習俗と紛争処理,” in *Kishū Byōzoku ringyō keiyaku bunsho kaihen (1736–1950-nen)* 貴州苗族林業契約文書匯編 (1736--1950年) [hereafter BZR], (Tokyo: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2001), 90.

³² Wu Caimao 吴才茂, “Tusi de Xiaowang Zhi Lu: Qingdai Chixinandong Si Gaitu Guioliu Hou Cunfei Wenti Zaibian 土司的消亡之路: 清代赤溪涌洞司改土归流后存废问题再辨,” *Qinghai Minzu Yanjiu* 32, no. 3 (2021): 20–27.

³³ See the section on *tusi* in Qiandongnan Miaozi Dongzu Zizhizhou Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, *Qiandongnan Zhouzhi: Minzu Zhi*, Chapter 2, which states that the native chieftaincies of the area did not have designated manors or fiefs per se. This would not be surprising in light of how Jennifer Took described a native chieftaincy in Daxin county, Guangxi, based mostly on later ethnographic research: It is more likely that the distinction of “official” fields by imperial authority for the use of native chieftains did not matter too much on the ground because the native chieftains had the ability to expropriate land from their subjects as needed. Took, *A Native Chieftaincy*, 184–225.

³⁴ See for example the contract holdings of the Longs of Liangzhai *zhangguansi*. Though the timing of preserved contracts from Liangzhai do not extend to the Ming or the early Qing, it is still clear from the types of contracts being written later in the 1800s that the locale was

were small in terms of their landholdings and population relative to the villages they were supposed to have jurisdiction over.

Table 1: The Native Chieftaincies of Liping Prefecture			
Name	Hamlets under Jurisdiction	Taxable Land 原額全熟田	Citation
Ouyang zhangguansi 欧阳长官司	13	1338 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 107b; 卷三(上), 15a
Hu'er zhangguansi 湖耳长官司	18	1897 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 107b; 卷三(上), 15a
Zhonglin zhangguansi 中林长官司	24	1887 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 107a; 卷三(上), 15a
Liangzhai zhangguansi 亮寨长官司	21	1457 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 106b; 卷三(上), 14b
Longli zhangguansi 龙里长官司	50	1233 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 105b; 卷三(上), 14a
Bazhou zhangguansi 八舟长官司	27	2214 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 102b; 卷三(上), 13a
Guzhou zhangguansi 古州长官司	66	1150 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 104a; 卷三(上), 14a
Xinhua zhangguansi 新化长官司	11	1280 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 107a; 卷三(上), 14b
Caodi zhangguansi 曹滴长官司	11	1794 mu	LPFZ 卷二(上), 109b; 卷三(上), 15b

specializing in grain and fruit production as opposed to the timber-based villages we see in this study. See the documents in GZLZ. See also Wu Caimao, “Liangzhai;” Wang Qinmei, “Qingdai Qiandongnan Liangzhai.” On the *haodi* rotating system of slash-and-burn agriculture, see Mandu’erte, “Lun nongcun gongshe,” in *Mandu’erte minzuxue wenji*, (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2006), 50-67; Du Halde, a Jesuit surveyor for the Qing court observed in the late Kangxi reign that the Miao of Liping prefecture were already engaged in the timber trade, bartering timber for cattle, and sending the timber downstream in rafts. See *Descriptions de l’Empire de la Chine*, cited in Inez de Beauclair, *Tribal Cultures of Southwest China*, (Taipei: Oriental Culture Service, 1970), 72-142.

Chixinandong si 赤溪 楠洞司	-	-	-
Xishanyangdong si 西山阳洞司	-	-	-
Tanxi zhangguansi 潭 溪長官司	-	-	-

Labor in particular appears to have been a pressing resource constraint for the chieftains. A contract dated to 1714 records a *tuguan* seeking laborers from outside the province to work his lands that had gone fallow. Apparently workers could not be found from nearby.

“Establishing this contract is Pingzhen *si tuguan* Fu. Now, the local residents of Pingzhen are dispersed in all directions. The paddy lands are lying fallow [*tianqiu huangwu* 田丘荒蕪], money and grain are lacking... We now wish to make a call for cultivators from places outside the price [*waisheng gechu gengmin*] to make their way to the chieftaincy, cultivate the land, bear the state’s taxes...”³⁵

For extraordinary needs, native chieftains drew on their lineages for manpower and monetary contributions. In the early Qing, when the Yang native chieftains of Longli *zhangguansi* were challenged by their subordinate hamlets, who tried to obtain their official seal, they raised 0.5 taels from each of their lineage households to buy rations.³⁶ The Yang lineage, which had about 200 households, and perhaps about a thousand individuals, could thus mobilize a greater quantity of resources than even the largest hamlets within their jurisdictions, but not by

³⁵ Gao Cong and Dan Hongpei, *Guizhou Qingshuijiang Liuyu Ming Qing Tusi Qiyue Wenshu: Jiunan Pian* 贵州清水江流域明清土司契约文书: 九南篇, (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2013), 454.

³⁶ Long Zejiang, Li Bin, and Wu Caimao, “Mucui maoyi yu Qingdai Guizhou Qingshuijiang xiayou Miao zu shehui bianqian,” *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu* 4 (2013): 21-30.

a large margin. Individual hamlets occasionally reached a size approaching this level, and by this measure, native chieftaincies in the region were not especially large or powerful.³⁷

The relative weakness of the Qingshui river basin native chieftaincies against their hamlet subordinates can be observed in military encounters between the two. In 1668, as Longli cracked down on Wendou hamlet for refusing to pay their taxes via the chieftaincy, they had to not only invite Qing troops, but also get extra funding for the rations of the troops, and send men from all their lineage branches.³⁸ Even a relatively small settlement like Wendou at the time could not be subdued by the native chieftaincy independently.³⁹ By the same token, a late-Qing transcription of oral tradition in Ping'ao hamlet (a neighboring hamlet to Wendou) tells of how Wendou itself was said to have had to lead a *kuan* to help the native chieftain (probably Longli native chieftaincy) suppress Ping'ao in the Kangxi reign.⁴⁰ Longli *zhangguansi*, in both of these conflicts with Wendou and Ping'ao was evidently not a dominant local force with the resources to suppress hamlets on the basis of its own power. Longli native chieftaincy had to administer fifty such hamlets in its jurisdiction. In terms of its coercive power, the institution was placed in a fragile position over villages that were its nominal subordinates.

In the long term, the native chieftaincy's role as a self-funding local enforcer for the Liping magistrate was threatened by the possibility of villages coalescing to form more potent military entities. Indigenous villages had existing political traditions of blood compact village alliances across the Qingshui river basin, sometimes referred to as *kuanyue* (款约), *hekuan* (合款), or

³⁷ See for example *Liangzhai manyi zhangguansi*, which had within its jurisdiction twenty-three hamlets, of which five had populations of over five hundred. See Wu Caimao, "Liangzhai," 29.

³⁸ Long, Li and Wu, "Mucai maoyi yu Qingdai Guizhou Qingshuijiang xiayou Miaozi shehui bianqian."

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ BZR, F0042.

simply *kuan* 款.⁴¹ These were territorially-based alliance compacts between individual hamlets associated with the groups now called the Miao and the Dong.

Sources from the Qing with descriptions of these political organizations are sparse, but these were institutions that Qing officials had at least a basic acquaintance with. One of these accounts can be found in *A Brief Account of the Suppression of the Miao*, written by Fang Xian, prefect of Zhenyuan, later circuit intendant of Guidong, Guizhou in the Yongzheng reign, and a close confidant of Yun-Gui governor general E'ertai. Fang Xian was known particularly for successes in the campaign to suppress the Miao in the southwest. Unlike other writers, whose original source of information is uncertain, Fang Xian was a likely first-hand observer. He made an excursion into southeastern Guizhou's highlands with indigenous interpreters and several assistants to meet with indigenous leaders, trying to push the Qing's pacification efforts closer to completion in 1728.⁴² Fang's report, written in a matter-of-fact fashion that can be placed in the

⁴¹ To the best of my knowledge there are currently no studies on the blood alliance compacts in the southwest of China, or *kuan* in the English language literature. For literature in other languages, see Christian, Daniels クリスチャン。ダニエルス, "Seinan Chūgoku - Myao bunkaken ni okeru hikanzoku no jiritsu teki seiken 西南中国。ミャオ文化圏における非漢族の自律的政權," *Ajia-Afurika Bunka Kenkyūjō Kenkyū Nenpō* 34 (1999): 56–70. Xu Xiaoguang, *Kuanyuefa: Dongzu xiguanfa de lishi renleixue kaocha* 款约法：黔东南侗族习惯法的历史人类学考察, (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2012). Daniels in particular sees the term as more generally applicable to the different alliance compacts in the southwest, but focuses more in the *kuan* in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province. I will follow his lead here in simply referring to the indigenous compacts in general as *kuan*, knowing full well that the term masks differences between different traditions of customary law and political organization.

⁴² Another official who could have conceivably left us with a detailed and first hand account of conditions in the southwest at the time was Fang Xian's immediate superior, the former Liping prefect, governor of Guizhou, and "aborigine suppression specialist" Zhang Guangsi. Unfortunately, because he was censured for his failures in the Jinchuan campaign, and executed on the spot in an audience with the Qianlong emperor, we are left with no personal records. His memorials from the First Historical Archive in Beijing were compiled by a Guizhou University research group, but even this collection mostly covered his career in the Qianlong reign, not in the Yongzheng reign, in which we are interested. Zhang Ming and Wei Tianliang, "Yongzheng Shiqi 'gaitu Guiliu' Yu Qingshuijiang Liuyu Mucai Maoyi Fazhan: Jiandui Zhang Guangsi Zai 'Sanjiang' Diqu Sheli 'Mushi' Wenti de Bianwei 雍正时期'改土归流'与清水江流域木材贸易发展: 兼对张广泗在'三江'地区设立'木市'问题的辨伪," *Guizhou Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* 36, no. 6 (2018): 61–71; Alfred Kuhn, "Chang Kuang-ssu," in Arthur Hummel ed.,

ethnographic genre tied to the Qing's colonial conquests, was quoted describing these indigenous compacts as follows:

“The *zaikuan* 宰款 and *helang* 合榔 are Miao customs. They carry the meaning of the blood sacrifice alliance oaths of the Han. It is also called *hekuan* 合款 or *guhua* 話話. The gathering place of the alliance is called a *kuanchang* 款場. Their leaders are called *touren* 頭人, and of them, their leader is called the *langtou* 榔頭. Those who repent to the alliance [after having committed a crime] are levied a fine called *peilang* 賠榔. All of these are Miao language [terms].”⁴³

The *kuan* Fang Xian described were the principal organizations charged with upholding *kuan* compacts (*kuanyue*). Written records of the actual content of *kuan* compacts are rare before the late Qing. Compacts were ordinarily passed down by oral tradition, and hence usually remained unwritten.⁴⁴ However, the compacts recorded in later periods can give us an idea of what the content of indigenous customary law was like in the past. Several compacts carved on a steles in the Republic had prohibitions against the following: theft of grain or fish from paddy fields; plotting with villagers and drawing in outsiders for misdeeds; submitting taxes late; allowing strangers to stay in the village; setting fires in the mountains; using deceptive weights and measures, and so on.⁴⁵

Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912), (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 43-45.

⁴³ Fang Xian 方顯, *Ping Miao Jilue* 平苗紀略, (Wuchang, 1873): 5b. Fang Xian's description captures the difficulty with terminology regarding the *kuan*, with multiple terms used to describe similar organizations. For our purposes, we will simply refer to the alliance compacts using the generic term *kuan*, even if they might be referred to using other terms, the most common of which include *yilang* 議榔 (usually used to refer to Miao alliances), and *hekuan* 合款 (used for the present-day Dong).

⁴⁴ Xiang Ling 向零, “Dongkuan xianggui ji qi yanbian: Dui Dongzu shehui zuzhi xingshi gongneng ji qi yanbian de tansuo 洞款乡规及其演变: 对侗族社会组织形式, 功能及其演变的探索,” *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* 3 (1989): 6-14.

⁴⁵ Xu Xiaoguang, *Kuanyuefa: Qiandongnan Dongzu Xiguanfa de Lishi Renleixue Kaocha* 宽约法: 黔东南侗族习惯法的历史人类学考察 (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2012), 23-25.

The *kuan*, as an alliance of independent villages, was not a centralized political entity. But this did not mean it was acephalous. A *kuan* had a headman (*touren*, *langtou*, etc), charged with running the organization, a *lilao* who was charged with the interpretation of *kuan* agreements (in the manner of a court), and a ceremonial master (*jishi*). The *kuan*, in ritual terms, derived its legitimacy from sanction obtained through a cyclical cattle sacrifice ceremony called *chi guzang* (吃鼓藏 “eating cattle innards”), with the cattle’s meat distributed among the participating hamlets, and linking them by sacrifice to their ancestors.⁴⁶ The sacrifice served the additional purpose of transmitting the content of *kuan* compact agreements to all members together with the physical distribution of food. Ties were further reinforced through inter-marriage and property ownership between allied hamlets.

The cellular units that constituted the different blood compact alliances were the natural hamlets. Individual hamlets were led by *zhailao*, selected from morally upright and highly respected men regardless of ancestry. Unlike the *gushe* or the *kuan* their responsibilities were more practical: They managed disputes among kin or members of the hamlet, preserved social order, and upheld claims to property. They served as the face of the hamlet to the outside world, a role that occasionally overlapped with their service as *touren* (headmen) in *kuan* alliances or in *gushe*, placing the *zhailao* at the intersection of village, *kuan* and kinship organizations in the area.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Just like the *kuan* formation, *chi guzang* is widely practiced among the southwest’s different ethnic groups for different purposes (not just to affirm a *kuan*), and refers to different variations of a similar ceremony. The practice was known to Qing officials (see the entry on the “Hei Miao” in Aibida’s *Qiannan shilüe*, and (Guangxu) *Liping fu zhi*. The centrality of the sacrifice ritual is also clearly implied by the term that Fang Xian used to describe it: *zaikuan* 宰款, where *zai* refers to the ritual slaughter of cattle. However, detailed descriptions were not written until the 20th century. Yang Zhengwen, “Guzangjie yishi yu Miaozu shehui zuzhi,” *Xinan Minzu Xueyuan Xuebao* 21.5 (2000): 13-27.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

For the *kuan* and the hamlet-based organizations, the Qing played no role in the selection of leadership. Legitimacy was still derived from the agreement and coordination of component hamlets or members, unconstrained by the the bounds of Qing law or hereditary privileges.⁴⁸ Acclamation or election to positions within the *kuan* was fluid, unconstrained by the the bounds of Qing law or hereditary privileges of the native chieftains. While there was some hierarchy within these organizations, they were not highly differentiated as one might imagine for a polity with standing administrators and armies. *Kuantou* and *zhailao* themselves received no special compensation or privileges for their service and held no special coercive powers over their charges derived from the authority of the central state.⁴⁹

The *kuan* and the hamlet organizations were oriented towards everyday matters of common concern among constituent hamlets rather than the sustenance or expansion of leading hamlets or clans. *Kuan* compact stipulations generally covered a similar and generally formulaic menu of practical prohibitions against theft and banditry. Occasionally, compacts would be drawn up to address specific concerns outside the usual menu of rules. An example of this is the following compact between four branches of the Jiang lineage of Wendou hamlet written in 1750, which I will cite at length:

Establishing this contract of shared mind and joint will between the four branches are
Jiang Mengxiong, Jiang Shiheng, Jiang Shichao...For we and others reside by [the
Qingshui river], and for generations, we have used [the sacrifice of] bulls to honor our
ancestors as precedent. The time that has elapsed has been long, and yet, in accordance

⁴⁸ Yang Zhengwen, "Guzangjie yishi yu Miao zu shehui zuzhi," *Xinan Minzu Xueyuan Xuebao* 21.5 (2000): 22.

⁴⁹ Xiang Ling, "Dongkuan Xianggui Ji Qi Yanbian: Dui Dongzu Shehui Zuzhi Xingshi, Gongneng Ji Qi Yanbian de Tansuo 洞款乡规及其演变: 对侗族社会组织形式, 功能及其演变的探索," *Guizhou Minzu Yanjiu* 39 (1989): 6–14; Qiandongnan Miao zu Dongzu Zizhizhou Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, *Qiandongnan Zhouzhi: Minzu Zhi* 黔东南州志: 民族志 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2000), 16-19.

with [our ancestors'] memory, we honor our ancestors and forbears. Hence we in [Wendou hamlet⁵⁰] come together in common purpose to discuss.

Since our discussion, there are once more merchant households living intermingled and slaughtering [livestock] who do not make plans in accordance with the locals, and do not comprehend the difference between an infected cow and a good cow, driving them all in for slaughter, and hence we cannot live in peace. We, with the same will, having agreed on our own accord, prohibit merchant households and people who come from the inner areas [*neiren*] from slaughtering animals. If there are those who slaughter pigs, they may only slaughter good [healthy] pigs. Those who purchase from outside must pass seven days [in isolation]...If there is any one branch that does not have their will in step and does not listen to the people, they will be fined..."⁵¹

This contract shows how a *gushe*—a kinship-based alliance of the Miao—was operating in hamlets on the Qingshui river not long after the rebellions of the late Yongzheng reign, marked by the celebration of shared ancestry through the cattle sacrifice (“we have used [the sacrifice of] bulls to honor our ancestors”) that was cited as the ritual basis for their discussion to jointly regulate the slaughter of pigs.⁵² The compact is a preview of the changes over the eighteenth century that will be discussed later in this chapter, on the increased circulation of merchants, commodities, and in this case specifically of diseases. The contract underlines the intensely

⁵⁰ In the local Miao language, Wendou was referred to as “Randu 冉都,” which means “mountain ridge facing the water.” This was transcribed in Han script as “Wendu 文都,” and later “Wendou 文斗.” Wang Zongxun, “Wendou Sanlaojia Ji Qi Qiyue Wenshu 文斗三老家及其契约文书,” *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 3, no. 2 (2011): 47–53.

⁵¹ *Jiang shi zupu*, cited in Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucaizhi liudong: Qingdai Qingshuijiang xiayou diqu de shichang, quanli yu shehui*, (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 218.

⁵² *Ibid.*

practical orientation of blood compact alliances like the *kuan* or the *gushe*. Their reason for being remained concrete and embodied in local concerns.

The rituals and symbols employed by indigenous organizations were distinct from those used by native chieftains, and drew on a combination of place, tradition and ancestry for legitimacy, in contrast to the imperially commissioned seals, charters and genealogical charts of the native chieftaincies. The bull fighting (*douniu*) and cattle innard consumption (*chi guzang*) rituals, where they “for ten years they rear a cow for ten, [then] sacrifice it to heaven and earth and their ancestors,” were already known by eighteenth-century officials like Yun-Gui governor general Aibida to have been central to indigenous society.⁵³ Much later descriptions were more cognizant of local variation in these rituals, but in general, the sacrifice of the fighting bulls was made in the name of ancestors or an alliance of villages. The horns and the skulls of the sacrificed bulls took a central position in homes, where they were attached to a post that served as an ancestral altar.⁵⁴ Another important symbol for the *kuan* was the buried commemoration stone (*maiyan*), which was used to mark agreements in general, more or less in place of a contract before the widespread use of Han characters. Such stones were used as physical representations of an alliance compact in combination with oral traditions. In time they would merge with the tradition of stele carving to permanently commemorate *kuan* compacts and all sorts of agreements in southeastern Guizhou.⁵⁵

Despite its seemingly loose character, and despite the often ad hoc nature of its organization—the *kuan* tended to be temporary formations, or at least required continuous re-affirmation through the cyclical sacrifice rituals—the *kuan* stood as a potential institutional

⁵³ Aibida, *Qiannan shilüe*, juan 21, 9b.

⁵⁴ See Footnote 29 in “The Song of Gold and Silver”, Mark Bender, Wu Yifang and Levi Gibbs, *Hmong Oral Epics*, (Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 2012).

⁵⁵ Xu Xiaoguang, *Kuanyuefa: Qiandongnan Dongzu Xiguanfa de Lishi Renleixue Kaocha* 宽约法:黔东南侗族习惯法的历史人类学考察, (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2012), 1-38.

vehicle for villages to displace the native chieftain's advantage in coercive power. *Kuan* compacts were capable of mobilizing resources beyond a narrow locale, even over the span of several *kuan*—a contrast to the idea that Miao or Dong society below the level of the native chieftaincy was invariably an acephalous mass with little potentiality for sustained military or political activity.⁵⁶ Coagulation against imperial agents in large numbers was part of the indigenous political repertoire, and can be unearthed in indigenous oral traditions. The largest of the *hekuan* known to have formed brought together multiple *dakuan* covering an area stretching from Guzhou to Liuzhou in Guangxi province, and pulling together well over one hundred thousand persons in an eight year rebellion in the Ming dynasty.⁵⁷

Qing officials on the frontlines (and perhaps even the emperor himself, who read these reports) knew of the potential of the *kuan* as an institution to mobilize large numbers of villages in the Qingshui river basin. E'tertai, cognizant of the limits of their coercive powers beyond the Qingshui river's banks, reported to the Yongzheng emperor their willingness to accept the *kuan* as allies. He memorialized in 1729:

“Although many hamlets have already submitted, the area is surrounded by barbarians and backed by water. Strategic areas must be garrisoned with heavy troops so that it may be controlled. [For this] the river is of the utmost significance...

⁵⁶ On the *kuan* in general, see Wang Zongxun, “Falu zugui yu kuangui kuanyue de hushen ji zuoyong: yi Kuidan Dong zhai wei li,” *Guizhou Daxue Xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 35.4 (2017): 39-44; Qiandongnan Miaozu Dongzu Zizhizhou Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, *Qiandongnan Miaozu Dongzu Zizhizhou Zhi: Minzu Zhi*, (Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Chubanshe, 2000), 16-23; Yang Zhengwen, “Guzangjie yishi yu Miaozu shehui zuzhi,” *Xinan Minzu Xueyuan Xuebao* 21.5 (2000): 13-27.

⁵⁷ For secondary summaries of the Ming rebellion led by Wu Mian 吴勉, see Deng Minwen 邓敏文 and Wu Hao 吴浩, *Meiyong guowang de wangguo: Dong kuan yanjiu* 没有国王的王国：侗款研究, (Beijing, Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995), 25-55, 88-130; Xu Xiaoguang, *Kuanyefa*, 1-18, 38-62.

Seeing that the Miao lands have always had the custom of *hekuan* [查苗地向有合款之例], and that now, the *shengmiao* who have submitted from near and far of the Qingshui river's south bank have already paid taxes and formed *jia*, totalling over forty hamlets, or no less than 10,000 households, [thus I, Zhang Guangsi] summoned their *hekuan* [因传其合款]. On the fifth day of the month [I had them] gathered, and then exposed the crimes of [the rebel] Gong'e.⁵⁸

This document is most notable for re-affirming that Qing officials did make direct contact with the *kuan* as an institution at this time, and actively sought it as a tool to communicate with the indigenous population. Despite the presence of native chieftaincies, Zhang Guangsi saw the potential for alternative intermediary indigenous institutions, and interfacing directly with the hamlets and hamlet alliances. Zhang Guangsi's confidence in the incorporation of Miao and Dong in tax-paying, *baojia*-registered hamlets were not affirmed by later documents, and his success in putting the region firmly within Qing rule was far from complete. However, this document lays once again the same structural issue we have seen repeatedly so far: The limited power of the native chieftains, and the existence of alternative institutions that carried the potential to displace it.

The Usurpation of the Native Chieftains

The native chieftaincies were thus already in a difficult position relative to indigenous hamlets and blood compact alliances even before the campaign to incorporate southeastern Guizhou into the Qing's central administration during the Yongzheng reign. The native chieftaincies were small and under-resourced. In their jurisdictions, they oversaw villages and

⁵⁸ Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'an guan and Zhongguo renmin daxue Qing shi yanjiusuo, *Qingdai Qianqi Miaomin Qiyi Dang'an Shiliao Huibian* 清代前期苗民起义档案史料汇编, vol. 1 (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1987), 39-43.

village alliances, with fluid political organizations and distinct sources of legitimacy, over whom their coercive capacity was limited. Incidents of insubordination from the previous section hint at the potential for conflict in this imbalanced political environment. Major changes in the underlying social and economic strata beginning in the late-Ming—and cutting through the temporal milestone of *gaitu guiliu* in the Yongzheng reign—tilted the balance of power further against the native chieftaincies and undermined their usefulness to the Qing as intermediaries. Migration, demographic growth, new market institutions, the commodification of forests, literacy in Han script, and the increased circulation of people, knowledge, technology, transformed capacities within indigenous villages and created new fronts of contestation with the native chieftaincies and the system of indirect rule that had been in place since the Yuan and the Ming.

Within the English-language literature, there has been a tendency to emphasize the role of the Ming and Qing states in breaking the isolation of the southwestern frontier through policies of active colonization and acculturation.⁵⁹ In southeastern Guizhou, such policies were manifested in the dredging of the Qingshui river, the establishment of direct administration units, the establishment of the official timber trade monopolies, and, not least, a commitment to put down resistance to incorporation by force.⁶⁰ These interventions were important, and they will be

⁵⁹ John Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China's Colonization of Guizhou, 1200-1700*, (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2007); An Qi, "Protecting the 'Children': Early Qing's Ethnic Policy," *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 4.2 (2009); Herman, "The Cant of Conquest: Tusi Offices and China's Political Incorporation of the Southwest Frontier," in *Empire on the Margins*; McMahon, "New order on China's Hunan Miao Frontier, 1796–1812," in Daniel McMahon ed., *Rethinking the Decline of China's Qing Dynasty: Imperial Activism and Borderland Management at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Routledge, 2014); Kent Clarke Smith. *Ch'ing Policy and the Development of Southwest China: Aspects of Ortai's Governor-Generalship, 1726-1731*. Ph.d diss., Yale University, 1970.

⁶⁰ On the Chinese language literature, see Yang Yougeng, "Han minzu dui kaifa Qingshuijiang shaoshu minzu linq de yingxiang yu zuoyong (shang)," *Guizhou minzu xuekan* 54.2 (1993): 48-55; Yang Yougeng, "Han minzu dui kaifa Qingshuijiang shaoshu minzu linq de yingxiang yu zuoyong (xia)," 55.3 (1993): 138-144. A widely cited source that also reflects this general thrust is *DSLD*. For a high level overview of the Chinese-language literature see Xu Xiaoguang

discussed later in this section. However, what I wish to focus on here are less the activities that appear in state-produced historical sources that have been more thoroughly exploited in the historiography, and more the activities of (and occasionally documented by) “ordinary” people in southeastern Guizhou, arguing that changes in demography, education, and commercialization were longer term trends in cutting through the Qing interventions to incorporate southeastern Guizhou.

Unlike the indigenous communities of contemporary imagination, who are displaced from their ancestral lands and who saw communal ties erode from the grand arrival of modernizing states and land-grabbing corporations, the incorporation of southeastern Guizhou and the demise of the native chieftaincies involved minute and seemingly innocuous efforts at self-advancement in important historical conjunctures.⁶¹ Diffuse choices to integrate migrants, set up private schools, sell timber to visitors, and to turn common mountain lands into enclosed properties chipped away at the intermediary position of the native chieftaincies, and produced new elites whose access to modest fortunes were tied to their participation in Qing commodity markets and negotiation with its local officials.

Migration and Population

Small numbers of Han migrants made their way into indigenous hamlets and settlements in southeastern Guizhou well before the establishment of the Qing. Migrants typically made their way through garrison towns and trading posts, from which single males might percolate into surrounding hamlets as agricultural tenants, craftsmen, laborers, or homesteaders in unsupervised lands. For those who attached themselves to a hamlet by providing some form of service, a right

and Cheng Zeshi, “Qingshuijiang wenshu yanjiu zhenyi wenti pingshu,” *Yuanshengtai minzu wenhua xuekan* (2015): 45-62.

⁶¹ See Tania Li, *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

to settlement could be won if they were able to establish a good relationship with locals, or earn it by some other justification. From there, individual migrants could then intermarry with, and eventually assimilate into the local population.⁶²

On balance, genealogies suggest that independent rather than group or household migration was more common, with the experience of the Wendou hamlet Jiangs serving as a typical example. Their claimed progenitor Jiang Chunli came to Wendou by way of the garrison town Tonggu *wei*, where Chunli's predecessors lived for five generations after moving from Jiangxi.⁶³ The genealogies themselves, being post-facto documents, were very likely to have painted over different intra-lineage origins, conflicts, and uneven incorporation of outsiders over time. Historical ethnographic work over the past decade studying the process of obtaining residence rights (*ruzhuquan*) in Jiachi hamlet tells us that new entrants to lineages and villages tended to be migrants who were in search of work, for example as a river crossing boatman or as a tile maker. Such Han migrants may be assimilated into the politically dominant lineages of a locality, and traces of their past erased from written records, but migrant origins can occasionally be revealed through the persistence of other markers of difference like the isolation of some lineage branches from common rituals and activities. Hence even beyond storied lineage progenitors for whom we

⁶² Wu Caimao, "Mingdai Yilai Qingshuijiang Wenshu Shuxie Geshi de Bianhua Yu Minzhong Xiguan de Bianqian 明代以来清水江文书书写格式的变化与民众习惯的变迁," *Xinan Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* 42, no. 4 (2016): 179–88.

⁶³ The Jiangs themselves were preceded by another small group of immigrants, the Longs, who immigrated to Wendou before they did, but ended up taking the Jiang surname when the Jiangs became politically dominant in the hamlet by the early Qing. These claims have to be qualified by how genealogies and oral histories can be problematic sources. Claims regarding origins might be dismissed as the imaginative and self-narrative of genealogy authors from elite Miao families eager to embellish their position vis-a-vis their poorer relations. In this case, the narrative may serve a useful post-facto justification for what turned out to be a "lineal" pattern of lineage development, with one branch (in this case Chunli's) protecting its resources at the exclusion of their other kinsmen. See Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucui Zhi Liudong: Qingdai Qingshuijiang Mucui Xiaoyou Diqu de Shichang, Quanli, Yu Shehui* 木材之流动:清代清水江下游地区的市场, 权利, 与社会 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 198-217.

have some written record of claimed migration paths, there are likely more cases of individual migration to be uncovered within the veneer of lineage unity from ethnographic research.⁶⁴

Outside of genealogical records and oral history, there are, as far as I know, no detailed cases to be found in stone transcriptions and family archives on migration before the establishment of the Qing. Sources on later migrations do affirm what the genealogies and ethnographies tell us about tenancies, trades and services as major channels through which sporadic outsiders became members of hamlets in the area.⁶⁵

Other migrants to southeastern Guizhou were certainly brought in by the state, at least for the first leg of their migration, before becoming frontier settlers when they escaped into the surrounding hamlets. Ming garrison soldiers were commonly cited in official accounts as migrants who followed this route, but they also appear in some vernacular accounts. The Yangs of the Longli native chieftaincy for instance claim that soldiers had already been forming marriage relations with their lineage as early as the 1400s.⁶⁶ Official accounts on the other hand also tell us that men from garrison households often married locals.⁶⁷ Aibida recounts in *Qiannan*

⁶⁴ Wang Jun, “Ruzhuquan: Qingshuijiang Liuyu Kaifa Guocheng Zhong de Renqun Hudong Yu Quyu Quanli Jiegou — Yi Jiachi Ji Qi Zhoubian Cunzhai Wei Zhongxin Taolun,” *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 7, no. 3 (2015): 42–48.

⁶⁵ Tenancy contracts from the 1800s for example show migrants from Hunan who came and served as forest tenants in BZR and the other family archives. See also Wang Jun, “Ruzhuquan: Qingshuijiang Liuyu Kaifa Guocheng Zhong de Renqun Hudong Yu Quyu Quanli Jiegou — Yi Jiachi Ji Qi Zhoubian Cunzhai Wei Zhongxin Taolun” 入住权: 清水江流域开发过程中的人群互动与区域权力结构——以加池及其周边村寨为中心的讨论,” *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 7, no. 3 (2015): 42–48; Zhu Qingqing, “Jiangxi Jie: Qingshuijiang Xiayou Yi Ge Yimin Cunluo de Xingcheng ‘江西街’: 清水江下游一个移民村落的形成,” *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 3, no. 2 (2011): 33–38.

⁶⁶ Long Zejiang et al., “Mucai maoyi,” 22.

⁶⁷ Tian Wen, *Qian shu (Minguo qianyin ben)* 黔书 (民国钤印本), (1690): *juan* 2 25A, for example, states that in certain places in southern Guizhou, *junmin* often married with *turen* (alternatively *tuzhu*), an ambiguous term that could refer to either Han or indigenes like the Miao depending on the context. Another comment from the customs (*fengsu*) section of the Wanli Guizhou provincial gazetteer states that *turen* often intermarry (*tonghun*) with garrison people (*weiren*), and that their seasonal celebrations, as a result, have “gradually been stained by Han customs.” (*Wanli*) *Guizhou tongzhi* (万历) 贵州通志, *juan* 12, 31A.

shilüe that Kaitai county (in his time newly established in place of the garrison town Wukai *wei*, of the sort from which Jiang Chunli of Wendou was supposed to have migrated) was mainly populated by soldiers in the early Ming, who have since formed families, multiplied in number, and over time “turned native” (*cheng tuzhu*).⁶⁸

Sources beyond the lineage and the village, that is, gazetteers and other writings by Qing officials, suggest a similar story of independent Han migration through nodes like the garrison towns in the Ming and early Qing. In the handbook *Qiannan zhifang jilüe*, Luo Raodian, speaking from a point in time when the importance of the garrison towns was already a distant memory, implied that there was a change in the source of migrants into indigenous hamlets away from garrison stragglers and towards the independent migrants who so troubled Qing officials in the late-18th century called “Han traitors” (*Hanjian*). It is said in the handbook that “the Han traitors, spreading out, incite the stupid Miao [*yu Miao*] and the cooked Miao [*shu Miao*], infiltrating [their hamlets] and illicitly ganging up with each other.” Then, making a comparison with the problems in the days of the Ming, it was said: “With the passage of time, their abuses [that of the *Hanjian*] are almost of the same level as that of the old Wukai and Tonggu *wei* [local garrison towns] of the Ming dynasty.”⁶⁹ Other sources like provincial and local gazetteers, though they do not discuss migration in granular terms, nod to the reality of close contact between immigrants and indigenes by their reference to mixed-residence (*zaju/cuochu*)

⁶⁸ Usage of the term *turen* or *tuzhu* by contemporaries appears to refer specifically to Han who melted into local society after a long period of residence, not just simply to indigenous peoples who preceded the migrants. Wu Caimao, “Yi pu yi zhi: Qingdai xinan tusi zupu bianzuan de fangzhi hua yanjiu——yi Liangzhai manyi zhangguansi wei li 亦谱亦志:清代西南土司族谱编纂的方志化研究——以亮寨蛮夷长官司为例,” *Yuanshengtai minzu wenhua xuekan* 12.5 (2020): 23. On garrison soldiers “turning native,” see *juan* 23 9A of Aibida, *Qiannan shilue* *Qiannan shilüe* 黔南识略.

⁶⁹ Luo Raodian, *Qiannan zhifang jilüe* 黔南职方纪略, *juan* 6, 5A-5B.

settlements, intermarriage, and nativization, suggesting that the migration pathways discussed in genealogies and oral histories mirrored the wider realities of migration at the time.⁷⁰

The Wendou Jiang genealogy claimed that the impact of early migrants like Jiang Chunli was to establish new cultural, educational, and political ideals. Jiang Chunli was credited with changing the local customs that were considered most objectionable by Han standards, such as open cliff burial, free marriage without matchmaker mediation, separated residence for newly-weds. He was also credited with hiring a teacher to educate the people in the hamlet, sowing the kernels for later educational success. The ultimate success of these migrants, so goes the story, was the direct submission of Wendou hamlet to Liping prefecture in 1695, well before mass participation in the timber trade and commodification of forests.⁷¹

The reality of migration's effect on indigenous society was probably not as linear as the Jiang genealogy tells us. With regards to nominal submission to Liping prefecture, Qing outreach to indigenous villages for assistance in local suppression campaigns and competition between hamlets and chieftaincies were important and more immediate triggers. A stele from Ping'ao hamlet claims that it submitted to officials (together with Wendou hamlet) in the Kangxi reign out of sheer awe for the Qing dynasty's "heavenly power," after they were drawn into the suppression of a minor rebellion, and thereafter "returned to the registers (*gui bantu*)."⁷² Ping'ao residents sent a petition to the Liping prefect saying that "we *shengmiao*...[were fortunate that your graces] regarded us like children, and demonstrated mercy, [so that] we may again return to living. [The coarse] Miao do know rites and law, and only rely on local customs, wood carvings,

⁷⁰ (*Guangxu*) *Liping fu zhi* (光绪) 黎平府志, Juan 18, 51b. Wendou hamlet was not alone in submitting to the Qing in the aftermath of an incident in the Kangxi reign. It was joined by its neighbors Ping'ao, Miaoguang, Miaonei, and many other hamlets.

⁷¹ Jinping xian linye zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Jinping xian linye zhi*, (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2002), 492-498.

⁷² Jinping xian linye zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Jinping xian linye zhi*, 492-298

and our relatives as a basis.”⁷³ Though the prefect’s response to this petition did not mention anything specific about schooling, it did respond to the petition by declaring that in these Miao have already “put their hearts and minds into transformation (*xianghua*),” and like the rest of dynasty’s “children,” were to listen to lectures on the sacred edicts on the fifteenth of every month, so that “[their] filial piety would then grow daily.”⁷⁴

Competition between indigenous hamlets and native chieftaincies in the Kangxi period was also an important factor. Officials in the late Kangxi reign were especially concerned that the Miao frontier in southeastern Guizhou was a safe harbor (*feidi*) for *Hanjian*, on top of broader concerns on stability in native chieftaincy jurisdictions. For this reason, the Qing’s attempted to constrain the native chieftains and expand the scope of jurisdictions under direct control at this time. The Qing assigned Han sub-officials, and placed tribal or village heads previously under native chieftain jurisdiction under direct supervision, and changed inheritance procedures, a contrast to the accepted wisdom that the Kangxi reign was a period of laxity in terms of frontier policy.⁷⁵

The turn of several hamlets neighboring Wendou along the Qingshui river to the Qing dynasty belonged to the second set of policies: the direct subordination of tribal and village heads. In the specific case of Wendou, direct subordination to the Qing was the immediate outcome of a show of force after a minor uprising led by two minor rebels named Han Shiru and

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Chen Jinquan and Guo Liang, *Guizhou Wendou Zhai Miao zu Qiyue Falü Wenshu Huibian: Yi Zunfa, Jiang Qicheng Deng Jiachang Susong Wenshu* 貴州文斗寨苗族契約法律文書匯編：易遵發，姜啟成等家藏訴訟文書, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2017), P280-281. Hereafter YZWS.

⁷⁵ John Herman, “National Integration and Regional Hegemony: The Political and Cultural Dynamics of Qing State Expansion, 1650-1750,” Ph.d diss., University of Washington, 1993; John Herman, “From Land Reclamation to Land Grab: Settler Colonialism in Southwest China, 1680-1735,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 78.1 (2018): 91-123; John Herman, “Early Qing Reforms to the Native Chieftain System,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.1 (1997): 47-74; Zhang Ming and Wei Tianliang, “Yongzheng Shiqi ‘gaitu guiliu.’”

Mi Yuankui in 1694. Qing troops were sent deep into Miao territory to clean up any stragglers, and the Liping prefect at the time, Song Minxue, asked several hamlets to help patrol the boundaries, presumably to stitch up the jurisdictional seam between non-Miao and Miao areas, reflecting the wider concern with safe harbors for criminals. Hamlets like Wendou responded to the crackdown by directly subordinating themselves to the local prefecture, in this case Liping.⁷⁶

Wendou also had conflicts internal to the hamlet that encouraged the same trend of direct contact with the Qing. The hamlet split into Lower Wendou and Upper Wendou during the Shunzhi reign, and both of the new hamlets remained in conflict for much of the early Qing, with occasional outbreaks of violence. Upper Wendou hamlet was said to have colluded with Longli native chieftaincy in the mid-Kangxi reign to eliminate the residents of Lower Wendou, whose residents had to disperse into the surrounding areas for their survival.⁷⁷ In 1695, when Upper Wendou submitted itself to the Qing through Liping prefecture, Lower Wendou hamlet was immediately jolted into finding a patron to which it could offer submission. The conflict with Upper Wendou precluded submission to Liping prefecture, so Lower Wendou instead submitted itself to Tianzhu county across the provincial border in Hunan province. The result of this attempt to counterbalance competing authorities by the two hamlets was a peculiar arrangement where Hunan had an administrative exclave that nominally paid taxes entirely surrounded by settlements that belonged to Guizhou.⁷⁸ Han migration and admission into indigenous villages

⁷⁶ For the narration of the Han Shiru and Mi Yuankui uprising, see (*Guangxu*) *Liping fuzhi*, juan 5.

⁷⁷ Zhang Yingqiang speculates that the conflict between Lower and Upper Wendou in fact originated from the arrival of Jiang Chunli. Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucai Zhi Liudong*, Chapter 5. Wang Zongxun, “Wendou Sanlaojia Jiqi Qiyue Wenshu 文斗三老家及其契约文书,” *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 3, no. 2 (2011): 51.

⁷⁸ For a more detailed account of the conflict between Lower and Upper Wendou, see Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucai Zhi Liudong*, 198-268. It is not entirely clear by when and by what means—whether it was through sheer economic dominance, or the simple passage of time—but the conflict between Lower and Upper Wendou eventually became less important. People from both hamlets were cooperating in forest enterprises by the 1800s, and Upper Wendou seemed to

were thus not instant catalysts for cultural sinicization, nor for political integration. Reality was likely to have been as messy as later accounts tell us, with incentives from different directions emerging at different times, and sporadic newcomers experiencing uneven degrees of local acceptance.

Where migration had a direct and indisputable impact was on population, density, and competition for land. Official records suggest slow growth between the Ming and the Qing relative to the rest of Guizhou and the Yuan river area. Liping prefecture, which covers all of the villages in this study, was said to have grown from 281,900 persons in 1672 to 286,000 persons in 1820.⁷⁹ However, these numbers may have undercounted the upward movement of population in southeastern Guizhou.⁸⁰ Non-quantitative sources support a view that population was not stagnant, and in fact grew quickly over the eighteenth century. With regards to migrants, Han migrant-dominated hamlets (i.e. not indigenous-dominated hamlets in which migrants assimilated) like Zhongyang and Nanlu hamlets emerged, with some of their migrants

have been recognized as the representatives of the hamlet to the outside world in both the genealogies and oral tradition.

⁷⁹ See Luo, Yunsheng, *Ming Qing Shiqi Yuanshui Liuyu Jingji Kaifa Yu Shehui Bianqian* 明清时期沅水流域经济开发与社会变迁, (Beijing: Shehuikexue chubanshe, 2016), 63-80; Peng En 彭恩, Qingdai Guizhou quyu renkou yu chengzhen dili fenbu 清代贵州区域人口与城镇地理分布, *Nongye kaogu* 4 (2023). Cao Shuji, in *Zhongguo renkou shi*, 265, attributes the very slow growth in the neighboring prefectures of both Liping and Zhenyuan to a lag in opening of agricultural lands.

⁸⁰ Further research is needed, but population records for Liping and Jinping county combined (Jinping county was split off from Liping in the early ROC) would indicate population growth of 1.6% per year from 1820 to 1953, well ahead of the pace at which Guizhou or China was growing, and a pace more comparable to a frontier region that was flooded by Han migrants like Manchuria. This degree of growth does not match up neatly with the periods of high mortality in the mid-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century from wars and natural disasters. One can speculate that the population numbers simply caught up with reality on the ground over this period as the institutions to inspect the population down to the village level in indigenous areas were established. See Guizhou sheng Liping xian zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., *Liping xian zhi* 黎平县志, (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1989), 90; DSLD, 1; Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China*, 192-216.

supposedly coming from as far as Fujian.⁸¹ For indigenous hamlets, meanwhile, old hamlets established new colony hamlets. These different hamlets competed over land boundaries and privileges, which is how we have been left with accounts of their progression around this time.⁸²

A more difficult question to answer is how much of the demographic growth might be attributed to migration from China proper, as opposed to improvements in health, nutrition, living standards, and public order in indigenous villages. The most important tailwinds for demographic growth in the early modern Qing such as agricultural migration supported with seed funds and tools, or the construction of irrigation facilities for the most part did not play a role in the study villages here and were unlikely to have supported indigenous demographic growth.

New World crops like sweet potatoes and corn were thought by officials to have become important crops, including for intercropping in indigenous agroforestry. Contracts from the Qing and later ethnographic studies argue that this view was erroneous, reflecting the limitations of what Qing officials were able to observe close to major towns and garrisons. Millet was overwhelmingly the dominant crop cited in agroforestry contracts, while glutinous rice (*nuomi*), which was not used for multi-cropping and left the fields fallow over the winter, remained dominant for paddy contracts throughout the Qing.⁸³ Crops that may have enabled use of the most marginal lands like sweet potatoes on the other hand were known to have seen delayed adoption in Guizhou, with some villages known to have made widespread use of the crop only in the 1900s.⁸⁴ However, at least one other source from the period suggests that maize was a known,

⁸¹ Wang Jun, “Ruzhuquan.”

⁸² See for example *Kuidan cun zhi*, 12-16; Zhu, “Jiangxi jie”; Document 4-5 of YZF; Wang Jun, “Ruzhuquan.”

⁸³ See the paddy rice sale contracts in multiple collections, including BZR, QSJWS. See also LPFZ juan 3b, 1a-2b; Hu Linyi, *Hu Wenzhong gong quanji* 胡文忠公全集, juan 3. These covers Hu Linyi’s efforts to encourage local planters to switch out of *nuomi* and intensify land use.

⁸⁴ Guizhou sheng Jinping xian, *Kuidan cunzhi*, 58.

and actively cultivated crop by the late-eighteenth century, and thus that Qing officials were not wrong.⁸⁵

Whether new world crops were widely adopted or not, improvements in food supply, at the very least, were obtained from expanded use of mountain land for growing grain, through combined *shanmu* and millet agroforestry (which we see in the village expansion and border conflicts) and fuller use of the labor year as the timber trade grew in size over the eighteenth century (the winter *nuomi* fallow season coincided with the traditional timber logging and trading season). The puzzle that awaits the discovery of more sources is on the availability of foodstuffs in markets for laborers who received cash wages at the village level. We know that cattle markets existed from the previous contract on diseases circulating from cattle merchants, but access to markets for foodstuffs in a village like Wendou for the moment remains a black box. Suffice to say, while migration was clearly an important phenomenon in southeastern Guizhou from the Ming to the Qing, caution should be exercised in overemphasizing its significance in demographic or cultural terms.

Education and Literacy

Education in Han script and documentary forms that facilitated direct interface with Qing officials began amidst this period of migration and competition for power between hamlets and native chieftaincies. We can say with near certainty that the education of most indigenous children in Han script and the classical canon at the basic level did not happen through state-funded or managed schools. Seats in county, prefectural or departmental schools generally went to native chieftain relatives, and not to indigenous inhabitants. In 1697, 71 out of the 74 military and civil licentiates studying in Liping, the supervising prefecture of Wendou hamlet,

⁸⁵ “Ti wei te can Liping xian jingli Jiang Jindeng Shufang minren Xu Dalai jia bei qie yiwu yi an qing zhi yi chu 题为特参黎平县经历蒋锦等疏防民人许大来家被窃衣物一案请旨议处,” 1813, 02-01-03-08996-022, First Historical Archives [hereafter FHA].

were from the native chieftain lineages (*tusi zushu* 土司祖属).⁸⁶ The success of the native chieftain lineages in the first hurdle of the examination system reflected the compulsory character of these policies, to which continued succession by lineage descendants was tied. The Liangzhai native chieftaincy enshrined these new requirements in their lineage genealogy, and copied the command from Yun-Gui governor general Zhao Tingchen in 1659 to have inheritors over thirteen years of age “enter the schools and practice the rites.”⁸⁷

Governors in the early eighteenth century sought to broaden access to education beyond the native chieftain lineages. In 1705 the Guizhou governor Yu Zhun in 1705 set out to build more charity schools (*yixue*), which was oriented more towards the basic moral and practical education of the many, rather than the cultivation of small numbers for official service. Yu Zhun’s rhetoric on education reflected a philosophy that accepted the Miao as subjects with the right material, who carried the possibility of eventual civilization and assimilation. He declared confidently that “once [these policies of inclusive education towards the Miao] are carried out for a long time, the Miao subjects will be able to turn into Han, and Miao customs can gradually be turned pure.” He adds to this a striking phrase that suggested a deep faith in the transformative power of state-sponsored education, such that it can even level the difficult terrain that has made Guizhou province so difficult for the Qing to govern: That if the Qing succeeds, then even “[these] lands at the end of the earth, will completely become an artifact of the state of the central plains.”⁸⁸

Many charity schools were built in southeastern Guizhou during the Kangxi and Yongzheng reigns. The building rush reached its height under the activist “new men” whom the Yongzheng emperor appointed to the key posts in the southwest. Zhang Guangsi, one of these

⁸⁶ See the entry for Kangxi 36 in Juan 29, Chen Wenxin ed., *Qinding xuezheng quanshu (jiaozhu)* 钦定学政全书校注, (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2015), 267.

⁸⁷ See GZLZ, 335-339, 369.

⁸⁸ E’ertai, (*Qianlong*) *Guizhou tongzhi* (乾隆) 貴州通知, (1741), juan 35. See “Miaomin jiu ru bantu, qing kai shang jin zhi tu shu 苗民久入版图请开上进途疏.”

“new men” who climbed the bureaucratic ladder in Guizhou at the same time as Chen Hongmou in Yunnan, was specifically credited with pushing the expansion of the charity school system in the *shengmiao* areas of Guizhou.⁸⁹ Zhang’s view was more pragmatic than Yu Zhun’s, in that he simply thought that sheer military force was not a practical way to keep the Miao pacified given the size of the territory and population they had to cover, hence the moralistic focus of the introductory texts he wanted students to read.⁹⁰ His basic agenda, in any case, was the same as Chen Hongmou’s: more school construction.

Among the different administrative units, Liping prefecture stood out for the extraordinarily large number of schools established just in the Yongzheng reign—more schools than in all the other reigns before the Taiping rebellion combined. Building schools, however, was a different matter from sustaining them. Charity schools and other equivalent institutions in the southwest tended to rely on state funding and management to work. Otherwise, they had to rely on the energy and creativity of local magistrates and their supervisors.

While Yunnan province, where Chen Hongmou’s unusually meticulous strategy to obtain bottom-up funding for schools that could continue operating whichever way the policy winds blew, has been brought up as an example of successful operation of the charity school system, the Guizhou schools that Zhang Guangsi built continued to rely on top-down transfers to cover their most basic of costs. In 1740, the Qianlong emperor decreed that funding for the honoraria of teachers (about 20 taels per annum) continue to be expensed through the provincial common funds (*gongfeiyin*)—a discretionary fund that could have gone to major public works, disaster

⁸⁹ William Rowe, “Education and Empire in Southwest China: Ch’ên Hung-Mou in Yunnan, 1733-1738,” in Benjamin Elman ed., *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 417–57.

⁹⁰ Zhang Yuqiong, “Lun Qingdai Guizhou Yixue de Fazhan 论清代贵州义学的发展” *Guizhou wenshi congkan*, no. 1 (2002): 55–60.

relief and other priorities of provincial-level officials.⁹¹ Even with these subsidies, Guizhou schools continued to struggle. By 1751, jaded by the seeming lack of progress, the emperor described Guizhou’s charity schools as “pottery dogs”—that is, mere ornaments which served no useful function other than maintaining the pretense that Qing officials had been educating the Miao.⁹²

Table 2: Charity School Construction by Reign					
Administrative Unit	Kangxi	Yongzheng	Qianlong	Jiaqing	Daoguang
Liping Prefecture 黎平	6	58	9	1	14
Zunyi Prefecture 遵义府	4	1	15	0	14
Duyun Prefecture 都匀府	4	23	5	7	11
Xingyi Prefecture 兴义府	5	3	0	0	22
Zhenyuan Prefecture 镇远府	4	9	0	0	0
Sinan Prefecture 思南府	2	1	0	0	10
Sizhou Prefecture 四州府	1	1	0	0	1
Taken from Zhang Yuqiong 张羽琼, “Lun Qingdai Guizhou yixue de fazhan,” <i>Guizhou wenshi congkan</i> 1 (2002): 59.					

The Qianlong emperor, who was initially content to continue his father’s policies upon assuming the throne, grew sour in his tone on the possibility of aggressively assimilating the Miao over the years building up to this sharp criticism of Guizhou’s schools. He eventually reversed the Qing’s educational policies in Guizhou. Some charity schools were simply closed. Other schools were surreptitiously winded down to avoid giving the Miao the impression that

⁹¹ Su’erna et al., *Qinding Xuezheng Quanshu Jiaozhu* 钦定学政全书校注, (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2015), *juan* 74, P288-289.

⁹² This discussion picks up on the article by William Rowe, which was focused on the charity school system in Yunnan, rather than in Guizhou. William Rowe, “Education and Empire in Southwest China: Ch’en Hung-Mou in Yunnan, 1733-1738,” in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 417–57. Note too that although Rowe cites *juan* 64 of *Qinding xuezheng quanshu*, you should refer to *juan* 74, as stated in footnote 64 of this paper.

they were being actively held back by the Qing, an underhanded policy to stop Miao education without introducing restrictions (“*bu jin er ting* 不禁而停”).⁹³ The rhetoric on Miao potentiality for assimilation also changed drastically. “Self-respecting” (*zi'ai*) teachers willing to throw themselves into a Miao school were thought hard to find, and even if they could be found, had difficulty in making progress with their students.⁹⁴ Education, rather than a force that could clear up Guizhou’s endless difficulties, seemed more like an endless drain on the provincial treasury with no results to show for. Literacy in Han written language, initially promoted as the vehicle for moral and cultural transformation, was re-framed by the officials now in charge as counterproductive in the project to preserve order on the frontier. In one argument by the judicial commissioner of Guizhou at the time that reflected the strong current of prejudice against the Miao, literacy would only empower a people whose nature was incorrigibly malevolent in resisting Qing rule: “The ignorant and stupid Miao, once their intellect and ingenuity are released, will most certainly come up with all sorts of treachery and deceit in great profusion [无知愚苗开其智巧将必奸诈百出].”⁹⁵

The short duration of the period between the push to educate the Miao outside of the native chieftaincies and its rapid reversal (no more than four decades from start to finish), compounded by the doubtful reach and efficacy of the schools from the very beginning suggest from a top-down perspective that rising literacy in Han script among the Miao at the hamlet level was not attributable to the push to build schools in Liping prefecture. Qing policy towards and funding for education in Guizhou over the course of the 18th century was inconsistent, and was

⁹³ *Gaozong chun huangdi shilu* 高宗純皇帝是緣, *Academia Sinica Online Database of Han Records* [Hanji dianzi wenxian ziliao 漢籍電子文獻資料庫]: Histories [shi 史]: Chronologies [biannian 編年], juan 395, 194-1.

⁹⁴ Su’erna et al., *Qinding Xuezheng*, 289.

⁹⁵ *Gaozong chun huangdi shilu* 高宗純皇帝是緣, *Academia Sinica Online Database of Han Records* [Hanji dianzi wenxian ziliao 漢籍電子文獻資料庫]: Histories [shi 史]: Chronologies [biannian 編年], juan 395, 194-1.

unable to meet the high aspirations of Yu Zhun. Even if we presume that the new schools were somehow accessible to Miao outside of major settlements throughout this period, they were unlikely to have received their education in schools funded, managed, arranged or promoted by the Qing state itself.

Evidence from the bottom up, in *minjian* sources, affirms the general suppositions we can make about educational activities in the Miao hamlets along the Qingshui river from the top down. The vast majority of Miao hamlet residents remained out of reach for the state-sponsored education system, even for charity or community schools. However, hamlet residents, or at the very least their elites, pursued education in Han script independent of the Qing-sponsored education system in Guizhou. Returning once more to the Jiang lineage genealogy from Wendou, it claims that education in the hamlet was done by way of teachers hired from the outside, a private schooling arrangement (a *shuxiao* 塾校) completely outside the ambit of the state.⁹⁶ Within Wendou hamlet itself, the benefits from these opportunities accrued to a narrow slice of the lineage, such as the descendants of Jiang Chunli, whose line produced the genealogies, obtained degrees, and served as the main outward-facing representatives of the hamlet.

The broad outlines of the pattern described by the Jiang genealogy account can be further validated through other supporting evidence. On-site research by Yang Yougeng indicates that of the twenty-two schools that left behind physical remnants like steles or were recorded in gazetteers in present-day Jinping county (which overlaps with the Qing dynasty administrative boundaries of Liping), only seven can be classified as state (*guanban*) schools. The remaining schools were all privately established and privately funded academies (*minban xuexiao*). A much

⁹⁶ Wang Zongxun, “Cong Huawai Shengmiao Dao Qiyue Zhi Xiang: Yi Ping’ao Shuliang Fuji Bei Wei Zhongxin 从‘化外生苗’到‘契约之乡’: 以平 鳌‘输粮附籍’碑为中心,” *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 11, no. 3 (2019): 42–48.

greater number of such private schools was certain to have existed, only to have left history with no trace.⁹⁷

Geographically, Yang also found that state-run schools were more likely to be found in administrative centers, surrounded by environments more suitable for intensive agriculture. One of these state-run schools for example was in Tonggu *wei*, the mixed-residence (*zaju*) garrison town, and later county seat, through which Jiang Chunli was said to have immigrated to Wendou hamlet. Private schools on the other hand were more common in more isolated and difficult environments, or in non-administrative settlements. Many were built as villages began to generate larger surpluses from a timber trade, a change happened around the Qianlong and Yongzheng reigns, hence the frequent use of forest properties rather than just paddy lands as endowments for private schools.⁹⁸

The timing of the emergence of contracts in Miao hamlets, a key marker for functional literacy among its elites, is more consistent with a timeline for grassroots efforts at education in Han script that comes well after Zhang Guangsi's push to further broaden access to schools in 1730. In Wendou, the earliest of the contracts that I have found was written in 1684, commemorating an agreement between immigrant arrivals in neighboring Zhongyang hamlet regarding land rights.⁹⁹ However, this was the sole written contract from this time period that

⁹⁷ Yang Yougeng, "Han Minzu Dui Kaifa Qingshuijiang Shaoshu Minzu Linqi de Yingxiang Yu Zuoyong (Xia) 汉族对开发清水江少数民族林区的影响与作用(下)," *Guizhou Minzu Yanjiu* 55.3 (1993): 138–44.

⁹⁸ Yang Yougeng, "Han Minzu Dui Kaifa Qingshuijiang Shaoshu Minzu Linqi de Yingxiang Yu Zuoyong (Xia) 汉族对开发清水江少数民族林区的影响与作用(下)," *Guizhou Minzu Yanjiu* 55, no. 3 (1993): 138–44. See also Christian Daniels, "Shimizu e Ryūiki No Byōzoku Ga Shokurin Wo Kaishi Kaishi Suru Made—Ringyō Keiei He to Karitateta Shoyōin 清水江流域の苗族が植林を開始するまで—林業経営へと駆り立てた諸要因," in *Kishū Myaōzoku Ringyō Keiyaku Bunsho Kaihen (1736—1950-Nen)* 貴州苗族林業契約文書匯編 (1736--1950年), vol. 3, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2001), 9–48, and juan 4 of LPFZ, which references mountain properties (*shanchang*) being used as school endowments.

⁹⁹ YZF, Document 4-5.

survived, and it is followed by a long gap before we see a new contract, indicating that even if its dating was to be taken at face value, it has yet to indicate widespread use in the hamlet.¹⁰⁰ In the 1730s, on the other hand, is when we first see contracts appear in a cluster over a relatively short period of time. The first of these contracts was written in 1736, an absolute sale (*duanmai*) of a forest property to buyers from Ping’ao hamlet, citing a need to pay for military expenses. It also states that one of the sellers was paid 3 *qian* as compensation for serving as the scribe (*daibi*). The citation of a sudden need for cash to fund military expenses may be an indicator that the contract was in fact written at the time that it claims it was (the Miao rebellion in southeastern Guizhou started in the year prior), and supports the claims that Wendou and Ping’ao had turned into “loyal” Miao hamlets as the genealogies written later would claim.¹⁰¹ The quality and timing of the contract’s writing implies that both knowledge of Han script and contractual forms (the 1736 contract was already in standard format) was already accessible to the writers of the contracts, but widespread use would only come later in the century, a timeline that places more importance on the emergence of the timber market and timber-funded schools that preceded, rather than Qing efforts to promote education.

Creating Market Order

The Qing attempted to incorporate the Qingshui river basin and manage the place of native chieftaincies by various means. The most recent literature in the Chinese-language literature has shown that the re-integration of freshly abolished native chieftains as bureaucrats through extra-statutory positions labeled “native interpreters” was one way in which the Qing managed to

¹⁰⁰ This document may also be read as a possible marker of the same advance of outsider migration that pushed villages to enclose their territories, again indicating that these changes were well underway before the Yongzheng campaigns.

¹⁰¹ Yang Yougeng, Christian Daniels, and Takeuchi Fusaji, *Kishū Myaozoku Ringyō Keiyaku Bunsho Kaihen (1736--1950-Nen)* 貴州苗族林業契約文書匯編 (1736--1950年), 3 vols. (Tokyo: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2001), A0001.

make a compromise between complete elimination and increased state control of native chieftaincies. Other ways discussed in the existing literature include direct, but sporadic contact with individual villages under native chieftain jurisdiction for handling matters such as policing and taxation.¹⁰² Qing magistrates also came to play a role as defenders of local custom and market order in the interest of indigenous villages. It is to this role that we turn to in this essay.

The attempt to implement centralized rule in the Qingshui river basin in the Yongzheng reign was notable for its accommodationist character. The accommodationist turn in the strategy of the Manchu governor-general E'ertai in this region was informed by reports that filtered up from officials in the field. We return to Zhenyuan prefect Fang Xian, who made personal investigations of conditions in Miao villages, and explained to E'ertai in a visit to the governor-general's *yamen* that some of the "Miao" peoples of this region were prepared for closer administration by Qing magistrates. He argued that it was inappropriate to apply a uniform solution, and made a sixteen-point proposal. This proposal sought differentiated treatment of indigenous peoples, and made room for gradualist accommodation where appropriate.¹⁰³

Fang believed that the catch-all designation for indigenous peoples in the region of "Miao" lacked precision. Some who fell within this category were ready for Qing rule, and it was unnecessary, in his view, to violently remake the region's political economy as E'ertai had done in other areas of the Qing southwest. Fang argued instead for inducement to Qing rule through commerce. The Qingshui river would allow both Han merchants and Miao to take advantage of the area's natural resources—crops like tung, wax, cotton, bamboo, and mast wood—and provide the economic basis for what he considered a morally proper life: "If water vessels from up and down the river had no obstructions, then money and goods will flow freely. Not only the Han

¹⁰² Lu Shuxin, "Zaizao 'Tusi': Qingdai Guizhou 'Xinjiang Liuting de Tubian Yu Miaojiang Zhili,'" *Jindai Shi Yanjiu* 1 (2020): 18–33.

¹⁰³ Fang Xian, *Ping Miao Jilue* (Wuchang: Jun xie, 1873), 2a.

subjects, but also the Miao subjects alongside them will receive the blessing of nourishment and virtue.”¹⁰⁴

The Qingshui river was to be dredged, so that merchant ships could pass. Rocks, shoals and other physical impediments were to be removed. E’ertai agreed with Fang Xian’s proposal, and decided to proceed with his campaign in southeastern Guizhou.¹⁰⁵ The language used in E’ertai’s own memorial to the Yongzheng emperor in 1728, the year after he met with Fang Xian, strongly suggests that his thinking was eventually influenced by Fang’s idea of differentiating the Miao, as well as his confidence in assimilation through commerce.¹⁰⁶

Thus indigenous participation in commercial markets became a central strategy in the incorporation of southeastern Guizhou. The Qingshui river, which traversed this region, was dredged and cleared of obstructions to shipping. This provided a new and enduring physical basis for its connection to the larger Yangzi river system and downstream markets. Details on the improvements done on the Qingshui river are sparse in historical records, but the works that were likely to have been done, based on sources writing about the Qingshui river itself, and on what passersby reported after the the works were completed, may have included the removal of fishing weirs and shoals, the chiseling of dangerous rocks, and the building of towing paths.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ PMJL, 2a.

¹⁰⁵ PMJL, 4b.

¹⁰⁶ The line where E’ertai clearly used Fang Xian’s proposal as a reference was his list of the resources that Guizhou might be able to market if the waterways were open, in particular in the Jiugu area. E’ertai wrote: “In these areas [i.e. in Guizhou] tung oil, white wax, cotton, bamboo, large mast timbers, and other such things, are produced in great quantities. If we are able to use the peaceable establishment of garrisons to cause there to be no obstructions and disturbances, then the merchants of Hunan and Guangdong [coming upriver from Guangxi] from near and far can come up and down [the river] for trade. If all goods are able to flow unimpeded, then, with regards to Guizhou province, it will make taxes abundant, and convenience the people.” See *Zhupi yuzhi E’ertai zouzhe*, juan 125, 6, cited in Long Zejiang, Li Bin, and Wu Caimao, “Mucai Maoyi Yu Qingdai Guizhou Qingshuijiang Miaozu Shehui Bianqian,” *Zhongguo Shehui Jingji Shi Yanjiu* 4 (2013): 22.

¹⁰⁷ See for example Zhang Yiyan, *Zhi Qian riji* and Xu Jiagan, *Miaojiang wenjian lu*, in *Guizhou wenxian weijiguan, Qiannan Congshu* Vol. 5, Booklet 2, (Guiyang: Wentong shuju, 1922).

Nevertheless the river remained riddled with irregularities that made it hard to navigate even in the 1800s, with tight turns, many dangerous rocks and rapids.¹⁰⁸ These conditions continued to be limiting factors to interregional trade, and demanded higher levels of skill and experience from rafters who transported goods through the river.

New technologies to facilitate the exchange of goods on the waterways were introduced, specifically through the use of *mayang* freighters, a class of ships with superior tonnage, labor-efficiency, and safety in strong currents. At the time, this was a novelty—*mayang* ships were still in the process of displacing the older *qiuzi* ships in southwestern waterways.¹⁰⁹ An evolution of the *mayang* freighter called the *mayangqiu*, evoking a nimble fish of the name, and described as having a long, narrow body, with a capacity of three to four persons, eventually emerged as the favored class in the more difficult segments of the Yuan river. These two ships were the most commonly cited in gazetteers. They were said to have been the main ships that plied the river up to Tuokou, beyond which one had to take the even smaller *Wengdong xiaochuan* ships to enter Guizhou.¹¹⁰

The adoption of new shipping technology, just as with the growth of interregional trade, migration, and education, was partly an organic development that accelerated in the 1720s, and cannot be solely attributed to Qing intervention.¹¹¹ The vehicle for this process seemed to be the movement of people, with Mayang county immigrants fanning out across the Yuan river basin, marked by the establishment of Mayangese native place associations in the 1700s. Locals in

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Nanny Kim, *Mountain Rivers, Mountain Roads: Transport in Southwest China, 1700-1850*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 97-143.

¹¹⁰ (*Guangxu*) *Huitong xianzhi*, juan 1, 29b.

¹¹¹ *Mayangqiu* ships only get mentioned in Hunan and Guizhou gazetteers. More dedicated research to shipping in this branch of the Yangzi river system is needed to be certain, but the *mayangqiu* may have been a regional adaptation of the *mayangchuan*, used in the Yuan river system down to Changde in Hunan—later the furthest extent to which foreign ships and traders tended to go up the Yuan river.

Yuan river port cities like Zhijiang and Qianyang began copying the new boats.¹¹² By the 1800s, *mayang* freighters were the dominant waterborne vehicles for crossing not just the most difficult segments of the Yuan river route, but generally for the passage on the way to Guizhou.¹¹³

The Qing, however, made a direct intervention in organizing pilot commercial voyages through the waterways. Fang Xian hired a fleet of 145 Miao ships to make a downstream journey to Qianyang, Hunan for the purchase of salt, rice, and coarse grains. The waterway was reported to have become wider and deeper. *Mayangqiu* ships were also reported to have passed the waterways without obstruction, together with other local Miao ships.¹¹⁴ Fang Xian added, patronizingly, that as these ships passed through Miao hamlets, people would stand in delight by the riverbanks, and fight to do business with the merchants.¹¹⁵

However, the Qing's role was most prominent in establishing market order by selecting the groups which were to occupy the apex of the market as brokers for the expanding trade in commodities. Three large littoral villages named Wangzhai, Maoping, and Guazhi were already established as incumbents handling the trade in timber, considered a natural consequence of their geographic position in a calmer and wider stretch of the Qingshui river that was amenable to re-tying and storing timber rafts, as well as their common language and identity as "Black Miao" with the inhabitants of timber producing villages. Villages from downstream however considered the position of the three monopoly holders in the market an arbitrary phenomenon. They fought

¹¹² (*Qianlong*) *Xu Mayang Xianzhi*, juan 2, 15b.

¹¹³ (*Minguo*) *Guizhou tongzhi*, juan 19 [qianshi zhi juan], 28a; (*Qianlong*) *Zhijiang Xianzhi*, juan 5, 6a; (*Minguo*) *Duyun xianzhi*, juan 20, 27a; (*Qianlong*) *Jingzhou zhi*, juan 2, n.p. See in particular the section on water conservancy.

¹¹⁴ A *mayangqiu* was likely a small and highly maneuverable craft, evocative of the *qiu* fish, and appropriate to the Qingshui river's waters. See the explanation in Nanny Kim, *Mountain Rivers*, 67, which cites Matsūra, *Shindai naiga suiunshi no kenkyū*, (Suita: Kansai Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2009), 187-189. The passage on shipping and *mayangqiu* here draws on PMJL 10b-11a. It states that "in particular, Mayangqiu ships were able to pass without obstruction [*te mayangqiu chuan tongxing wu ai*]."

¹¹⁵ PMJL, 7b. I use the term "hamlet" to refer to villages that are termed *zhai* or "stockade."

for a share of the business of handling the timber trade. The downstream, largely Han village of Benchu in particular tried to cut off the established market towns and establish a separate brokerage in 1729, continuing attempts from the previous decades.¹¹⁶

A resident from Maoping hamlet made a petition in response, asking the newly promoted Fang Xian, now Guidong circuit intendant, to issue a prohibition on the actions of the Benchu villagers, and thus regularize their incumbent positions as hosts of the timber brokerages. Fang Xian was inclined to deny the petition, and instead open up the market to broad participation by littoral hamlets in trading activities. In the end, he made the cautious choice of siding with the customary brokerages, and banning any further challenges to their rotating monopoly of the timber trade.¹¹⁷ The position that Fang Xian conceded to these brokerages did not follow the conventions of Qing administration elsewhere, and can be said to have been a concession both to pre-conquest custom and a desire for ethnic segregation.¹¹⁸ They were not registered *yahang* that paid fees, held licenses, and were subjected to the rules governing brokers in the Qing, and yet they enjoyed the benefit of Qing support, as if they were ordinary brokerages.¹¹⁹ This case might be thought of as an early instance of successful interfacing between large indigenous villages and Qing officials, a phenomenon that will be replicated in the hinterlands of the Qingshui river basin as the timber trade grew in size. Once such customs were given the Qing's imprimatur, they carried weight akin to legal precedent, and were sources of legitimacy for magistrates issuing rulings and incumbents protecting their privileges.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ LPFZ, juan 3b, 32b; Smith, "Ch'ing Policy," 266; Zhang and Wei, "Yongzheng shiqi gaitu guiliu."

¹¹⁷ Zhang and Wei, "Yongzheng shiqi."

¹¹⁸ "Zou wei shenming Tianzhu xian minren Liu Jigang kong Liping fu shu lie jin Long Chengren lanjiang sishou mushui dengqing yi an lü ding ni shi," 1807, 04-01-08-0119-004, FHA.

¹¹⁹ For an extended discussion on the preservation of ethnic brokerages as opposed to conventional *yahang* brokerages, see Meng Zhang, *Timber and Forestry*, 183-230.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Local Monopolies

Deeper upstream into the Qingshui river basin, minor, customary privileges related to rafting, trading, and redeeming lost timber emerged and received affirmation in small villages over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along the main branch of the river, well-located littoral villages like Yaoguang benefited from these privileges, and produced some of the wealthiest lineages in the region. More peripheral villages in tributaries of the river also benefited from protections over their right to transport timber. Transportation became a monopolistic affair that relayed timber from village to village until it reached the brokerage hamlets, with outside rafters, merchants, and traders restricted from entry.¹²¹ Such privileges were granted in the name of recognizing services to the empire, or the right of the Miao to make a living from the timber trade.

These privileges, however, were complex matters that involved more than the Qing magistrate's approval. Just as with the monopoly brokerages, they were amalgamated with a mass of pre-existing local customs and practices. Vernacular understandings and practices regarding these concessions could diverge from official articulations we will later see in steles that copied the prefect's proclamations. A murder case that made its way to the magistrate's yamen shows for example how individual timber rafters may have thought of transportation labor as something they had a right to by force of custom and nature in small villages away from the Qingshui river's mainstream, without reference to any historically-derived rights to moving timber. A Miao rafter stated in his deposition to the magistrate in 1807 that "outside [his] hamlet, there is a stretch of the river where, whenever timber is sent from upstream to this place, because the river was exceedingly shallow, it was always the case that the people in our vicinity helped

¹²¹ Cheng Zeshi, "Cong 'Jiangbu' dao 'sanfu hetong': Qingdai Qingshuijiang liuyu fangmu zuzhi de shichanghua bianqian," *Hubei daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 45.1, (2018): 94-100.

with pulling the timber past. Without regards to our numbers, we received their 350 *wen*, which the people divided among themselves. It has always been like this without change.”¹²² Like the timber brokerages, timber transportation practice may have simply followed long-standing custom from reasons relating to local geography.

Customs regarding the movement of timber can be reinforced by other means that held legitimacy beyond the village, such as property ownership, and indigenous village leagues. A stele unearthed in Guangxi hamlet in Tianzhu county shows lineages purchasing land on the riverside to solidify claims to local timber, and suggests that they corralled labor through the lineage. The stele states that “[lineage members] jointly bought [this land] as a place to put up rafts, dock them, and release them...the children and grandchildren of owners possessing shares will not be charged rent, if those resting [their rafts] are from outside, it has been decided to charge a rent money of 30 copper cash per log.” Rights of use to littoral land were reserved for the dominant local lineage, and prohibitive fees served as a fence to keep outsiders away.¹²³

The enforcement of such claims, whether these claims were articulated through custom, property rights, or rights granted by the Qing, first went through the channel of local indigenous institutions. An indigenous village league declaration (*kuanshi*) dated to 1851 and erected in Peiliang village on the lower reaches of the Wu river, which flows into the Qingshui river around 50-60 li away from the timber brokerage towns, describes the customary rights to transportation on the river as analogous to the division of mountain lands into enclosed properties with borders, and makes a description of the basic economic forces that made timber vital for households: “The rivers have regulations, the mountains have borders (*jiang you gui, shan you jie*)...That

¹²² “Ti wei huishen Guizhou Liping fu Miaomi Shi Buqiaomei yin zheng la mupai dasi Wu Bujiesheng yi an,” 1808, 02-01-007-026487-0003, FHA.

¹²³ *Yong chui bu xiu*, stele unearthed in Guangxi village, Tianzhu county by Wu Caimao and Jiang Ming on October 4, 2010, n.d.

which was produced by the earth was only timber, and that which was needed for use solely relied on the river. When households were wealthy, they traded timber to nourish their lives. The poor took rafting as their occupation.”¹²⁴ These steles reflected the place of timber rafting in the regional economy as a source of wage labor for men located outside the ranks of landowning elites, something which remained true in the twentieth century, when an ethnographic survey found that nearly all able-bodied men worked as rafters in littoral hamlets like Yaoguang.

The text of the Peiliang stele underlines the role of custom in legitimizing rafting privileges, and the combination of both indigenous and Qing institutions in enforcement. Transportation from the village to Miaoguang hamlet, it states, was “not a new precedent [*fei xin li*]... Since our fathers have lived here for ages, there has been no change in this understanding.” Enforcement, however, followed a hierarchy that began within the village league, and ended with the Qing magistrate as the backstop. The league declaration threatened those who crossed customary borders with subjection to public justice for fines. Those unwilling to comply were to be sent to Qing officials for investigation. While prohibitory steles such as this can be read as aspirational statements, we will see in the following section that rights to transportation were indeed insisted upon by villagers, and brought to native chieftains and Qing officials for affirmation and enforcement.

Steles attesting to these privileges can be found in different parts of the Qingshui river basin. Though built on local custom, rafting privileges were not sought by villagers or affirmed by magistrates without any sense of regional history. They did not lose meaning outside the village context. Privileges had a cumulative and trans-local quality, drawing on a shared

¹²⁴ Chen Jinqun and Guo Liang eds., *Guizhou Wendou zhai Miao zu qiyue falu wenshu huibian: Yi Zunfa, Jiang Qicheng deng jiacang susong wenshu*, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2017), 294 [hereafter YZF].

vocabulary, and carrying the potential to mix with other articulations to such rights. As such, they were not at the complete mercy of the sitting magistrate:

“Seeing that each locale in Liping produces timber, and that subjects (*min*) and Miao rely upon it to make a living, there are local ruffians who use the excuse of passing timber to hire people for its movement, and to extract high wages...since 1777, there have been fixed regulations on the wages of rafters. From Yaoguang to Guazhi, every raft can charge a work fee of 4 *qian* 8 *fen*...”¹²⁵

In this text, dated to 1802, the magistrate cites a regulation more than two decades prior to his time to support his decision to preserve wages at the prior rate in Yaoguang hamlet. Magistrates worked with a stock of knowledge on regional affairs that could be passed down from term to term. In this sense, the privileges were not personalistic grants, but something more akin to customary law.

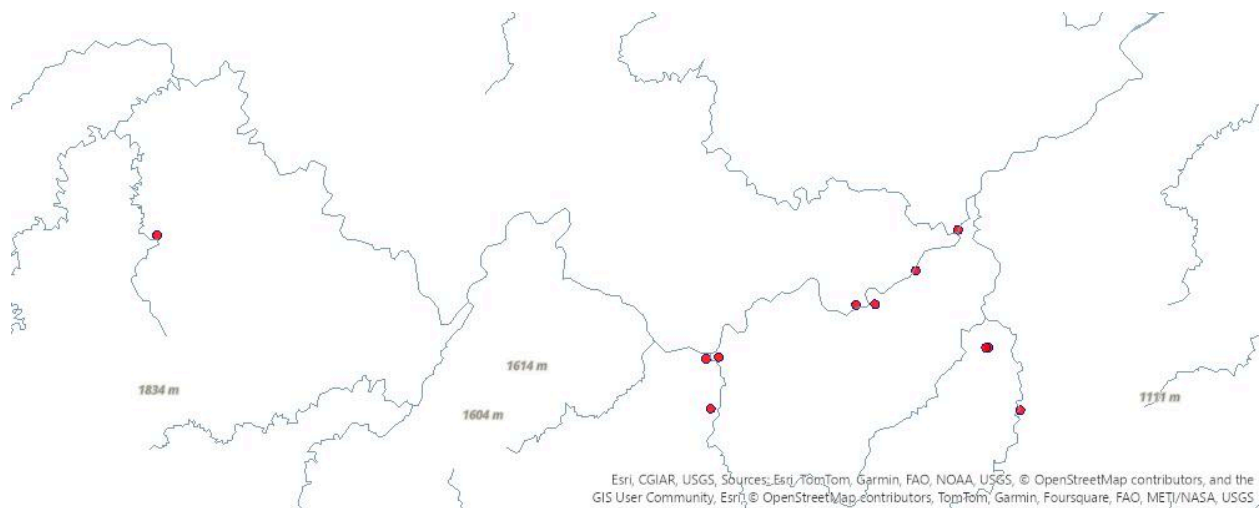
Moreover, villagers, by preserving copies of these documents, played a part in archiving local and regional customs. While regulatory steles have occasionally been moved or lost over time, they were historically preserved in socially important spaces, like the village league’s drum tower. One of the most important steles on timber transportation in the region, describing the larger architecture of rafting privileges in the basin, was similarly preserved in the temple of a popular regional deity in Wangzhai, the largest of the monopoly brokerage towns.¹²⁶ This stele copied an order from the prefect, with a list of regulations, stating that the river was to be divided into segments going up the river, prescribing wages and raft size. Rafters were prohibited from simply going with the flow of the river at the moment, or stopping at random points of their

¹²⁵ An Chengxiang, *Shishang lishi*, (Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 2015), 46 [hereafter SSLS].

¹²⁶ See “Babu jianggui,” in Wang Zongxun and Yang Xiuting, *Jinping linye beiwen xuanji*, (Jinping: Jinping difangzhi banggongshi, 2005), 35.

choosing. The customary divisions of the river were to govern the movement of timber, not nature or the rafters.

Figure 1: Xavier Ante, “Distribution of Timber Transportation Steles in the Qingshui River Basin,” December 2, 2024.



The content of sources related to timber rafting privileges suggest that they could be found in greater density along the tributaries to the Qingshui river, while along the main branch of the Qingshui river basin itself, from Yaoguang to the monopoly brokerages, timber rafts flowed with fewer interruptions. The division of the river into local monopolies, articulated through combinations of custom and privilege, had become established in the region. By the nineteenth century, these privileges had become a legitimate means of distributing the economic gains from the timber trade among the villages of the Qingshui river basin.¹²⁷

Enclosure

Private property was not a novel concept for people in the Qingshui river area before the 1700s. Paddy lands were thought to have been held privately, and private compacts have a long

¹²⁷ See for example the stele “Jieyang jincongshan jiexian bei,” in Wang Zongxun and Yang Xiuting, *Jinping linye beiwen xuanji*, (Jinping: Jinping difangzhi bangongshi, 2005), 53 [hereafter JPLB].

tradition of being used to demarcate what land belonged to whom.¹²⁸ However, forests and other “under-used” lands were previously held in common, or else left open for cultivation to whoever could come first. Common forest lands, once used for slash and burn agriculture, would gradually be enclosed and come into private hands over the eighteenth century, as commercialization advanced and new ideas of rightful ownership came into use.

The Qing state also tried to impose its version of order on the transaction of Miao property. A memorial submitted by E’ertai and endorsed by the court in 1725 said that because “the Miao often occupy [each other’s] land and kill each other in revenge,” they should “make contracts to clarify boundaries, and have officials seal them so that they may take up property.” Likewise, because some Miao at the time did not have names attached to the contracts, the same memorial states that those Miao “of the same given name much each in accordance with their ancestry compile a registry; those who do not know their original surname should establish one.”

Such policies, as we have seen repeatedly, do not translate so readily on the ground. Despite the explicit call from E’ertai to have boundaries cleared up and property related contracts stamped, the adoption of contracts was gradual, unclear boundaries remained a large source of disputes, and only a very tiny sliver of contracts were ever stamped over the next two centuries. The growth of contract-based transactions had to be built on already existing means of conducting and regulating exchange in the Qingshui river area. Before the Yongzheng campaigns of the 1700s, compacts or pledges were commemorated by practices like commemorative stone burials (*maiyan/zaiyan*) or wood notching (*kemu*) by the Miao and the Dong, much in the same way that the kuan compacts were commemorated. Though private contracts and public declarations were increasingly conducted through steles and then contracts written in Han script and contractual format, for the most part, the basis for the regulating and enforcing these pledges

¹²⁸ Xu Xiaoguang, “Qingshuijiang wenshu yanjiu zhengyi,” 48-50.

remained within the traditional social compacts like the kuan with which such practices were paired, resulting in a hybrid system where the validation of contractual force was at the hands of locals, not officials. The embeddedness of these commercial contracts in their social context perhaps explains why writers from the early stages of contractualization could afford to be so careless about the recorded details: They were not records of impersonal transactions, but of transactions between people with prior knowledge of what exactly was being transacted, who the counter-parties were, what the history of the property was, and which transaction validators can be relied on to smooth things out if things went wrong.

In hamlets close to river transportation and with a deeper history of interaction with outsiders like Wendou, there are no surviving documents that capture the initial moment of enclosure as far as I know. However, one of the earliest contracts associated with the hamlet dated to 1743 hints that enclosure happened in Lower Wendou at least by the first half of the 1700s:

“Establishing this contract of evidence are [Jiang] Laotang, [Jiang] Fuyu. Now, because Laotang’s tree falls on Fuyu’s land, when the retained tree grows [to maturity] it will be divided evenly into two shares. There can be no errors. Laotang may not plant [trees] any further. Fuyu may not plot [to obtain Laotang’s] tree.”¹²⁹

This contract may suggest a change in ideas about ownership that happened over the preceding decades. It was probably the case that Jiang Laotang planted a tree on what was once commonly held land ten or so years prior and hence obtained the right to the crop he planted with his own labor. In the intervening period between tree planting and the dispute, however, Jiang Fuyu was able to obtain the rights to the land on which Jiang Laotang’s tree happened to be

¹²⁹ Jinping xian dang’an guan, *Jinping linye qiyue*, juan 5 no. 1, cited in Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucai zhi liudong*, 208.

found. This created a conflict between two viewpoints regarding the basis of ownership, with Laotang representing an older view where labor was directly linked to ownership of the product (reflecting a time when land was plentiful and open allowing cultivators to simply reap what they sow), and Fuyu representing an emergent view where the owners of the land also had a claim to the product. The resulting agreement was a concession recognizing the legitimacy of these older rights, while also recognizing the change in regime, hence the even split of rights.¹³⁰

An extraordinary document from Ping’ao hamlet was able to capture a snapshot of a transitional moment from common to enclosed forest, albeit at a later date. This agreement, dated to 1786, states that Ping’ao hamlet jointly owned a mountain with Badong hamlet, but that this mountain was left untended by the residents. Hamlet residents, believing that leaving the mountain uncultivated was a waste, decided in a public deliberation that the hamlets should instead divide the mountain into plots, possibly for leaving land available for residents to stake ownership in if they applied their labor. The writers from Ping’ao and Badong hamlets closed this document with an aphorism that occasionally appeared in other contracts, and which served as the moral justification for enclosure: “[There would be] no better course than to carve [the mountain] up, and to leave it to the diligence or the indolence [of the people]. The diligent ones ought to receive rich profits, and the indolent ones should bear no resentment.”¹³¹

The contract between Ping’ao and Badong was a signal document that leaves us with clues on what changes happened over the past century to enable the emergence of hamlet elites who held forest lands and participated in the timber trade. The mountain in question was held in common ownership by two hamlets, and was probably left available for free slash and burn

¹³⁰ Jinping xian dang’an guan, *Jinping linye qiye*, juan 5 no. 1, cited in Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucai zhi liudong*, 208.

¹³¹ Shan Honggen, *Jinping linye qiye wenshu*, 39. See also Long, “Mucai maoyi,” 25; Xu Xiaoguang and Long Zejiang, “Guizhou ‘Jinping wenshu’ de zhengli yu yanjiu,” *Yuanshengtai minzu xuekan* 1.1 (2009): 57, which cite and discuss the same document.

agriculture. The rest of the document describes the property as bordering the mountain peaks, which suggests that this was a more marginal mountain plot that was usually opened up for timber cultivation only after the most accessible plots lower down the mountain were enclosed and cultivated. That is, it is almost certain that Ping'ao hamlet had already enclosed some common lands before 1786, and it was merely expanding the enclosed areas out to the edges of its recognized jurisdiction, hence the coordination with its neighbor Badong hamlet. The document may be considered an echo of the enclosure process that happened multiple times over the past century, and a marker of the closing internal frontiers between settlements.

The enclosure of the common land marked a contradictory solidification of a longstanding ideology on the link between one's labor and their access to resources. It does not seem likely that the Miao and the Dong held "primitive" communalistic views, or maintained a strictly egalitarian sharing economy of the sort thought to be held indigenous communities elsewhere. An ideology of "you reap what you sow" in a common land environment where there was a tight link between labor expended and resources obtained seemed to have been the outstanding view. This can be seen in other contracts like the one between Wendou and a neighboring village that claims to have dated to 1684, which states that "if [people] are permitted to expend their labor, those who diligently excavate will be able to eat their fill from the soil."¹³² This justification for rightful ownership was revived again with the enclosures of common land as we have seen. But the irony was that the enclosures also marked the delinking of labor and access to its fruits: It would no longer be the case that people "reaped" as they themselves "sowed," or that the "diligent" were the ones who necessarily profited. The century that followed saw the winners of the high tide of the timber market and their line of descendants obtain a dominant share of local forest and grain production going forward without respect to their labor—something hardly

¹³² Chen and Guo, *Guizhou Wendou zhai Miao zu qiyue falu*, 231.

visible to the pioneers of enclosure.¹³³ This was detrimental to those who were left out, or to those who fell through the cracks over time and lost access to land. But this was a critical development for social stratification and the formation of hamlet elites who eventually made their fortunes from their economic links to buyers from downriver, and protected their positions by interfacing as loyal, well-resourced and educated gentry with the Qing dynasty.

Conflicts and Grievances: The Case Studies of Gaoliu and Biancun

In the first section, I attempted to demonstrate how differences in material and political resources at the level of the *zhai* or the *kuan* against native chieftains constituted fertile ground for conflict. In the following sections, we saw how market participation, education and the sprouts of elite formation sharpened the potential for conflicts, and found new expressions through documents like complaints to magistrates, and contracts of settlement. In this final section, I will examine specific cases of conflict between indigenous residents and native chieftains that reflect the re-arrangements that were produced by the changes discussed in the previous two sections over the Kangxi to the Qianlong reigns.

The monopolies over various aspects of the Qingshui river timber trade, from those of major consequence such as brokerage and trading services, down to minor overland transport and river transport privileges, originated from piecemeal affirmation of customs, or concessions for service to the dynasty. They were not conceived as items in a grand policy to appease and assimilate the Miao. Villagers defended these privileges tenaciously, and prefectural officials were reluctant to make changes to these arrangements down to the end of the Qing and even into the Republic.

¹³³ This is inspired by a similar study on the emergence of capitalist relations in Indonesia's forest frontiers. See Tania Li, *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

As these privileges were consolidated, the native chieftaincies remained a factor in administration of locales, with chieftains retaining some of the powers they had over their jurisdictions.¹³⁴ There was thus room for ambiguity in the status of villages, which may fall under the jurisdiction of native chieftains, but could reach out to the prefect selectively for the investigations and adjudications. Major regional monopolies over timber brokerage were beholden to magistrates. But smaller local monopolies over transport remained within a zone of ambiguity, creating openings for conflicts of jurisdiction.¹³⁵

We can see how such a conflict over jurisdiction and economic rights played out in an incident recorded on a stele by residents of Gaoliu hamlet in 1811, based on a prefectural ruling. Gaoliu hamlet claimed to have obtained a grant from the Liping prefect for a local monopoly to transport timber on the waterways together with its neighbor Gui'e hamlet as a reward for labor rendered during the dredging of the Qingshui river. They state that by 1744, "in the term of prefect Xu, [we] received a promulgation ordering residents adjacent to the river to clear the waterways. From Gui'e zhai's gate to Nanbiao, [this length we cleared] was 50 *li* total...and with this, the people along the river were able to send down guest timber segment by segment...[this

¹³⁴ Lu Shuxin, "Zaizao 'tusi.'" Xu, *Kuanyuefa*. For more on mixed native and central administration in Guizhou, see Zhang Zhongkui, *Gaitu guiliu yu Miaojiang zaizao: Qingdai Xinjiang Liuting de wanghua jincheng ji qi shehui wenhua bianqian*, (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012), 186-199; Li Kun, "Ming Qing shiqi Guizhou 'qinxiadi' de shezhi yu zhifu xingzheng," *Guizhou wenshi congkan* 1 (2012): 88-92;" Ma Qi, Han Zhaoqing and Sun Tao, "Ming Qing Guizhou chahuadi yanjiu," *Fudan xuebao (shehuikexue ban)* 6 (2010): 122-128. Yang Tingshuo, Li Yinyan, "Tu liu bing zhi: tusi zhidu tuixingzhong de changtai," *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* 3 (2012): 89-100; Zhang Zhongkui, *Gaitu guiliu yu Miaojiang zaizao: Qingdai 'xinjiang liu ting' de wanghua jincheng ji qi shehui wenhua bianqian*, (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012).

¹³⁵ On customary law, ambiguities in case jurisdiction, and the Miao sub-statutes, see in comparison Sutton, "Violence and Ethnicity."

is] the origin of *jiangbu* [river segmentation].”¹³⁶ They thus asserted a claim to the river segmentation system, which a later stele indeed described Gaoliu hamlet as being part of.¹³⁷

Though the exact stipulations and origins of the grant were unclear, the two hamlets were content with the arrangement for the remainder of the eighteenth century. Many of their residents were relatives and maintained good relations with each other. The residents of Gui’e hamlet were the offshoots of a branch of the Xiang lineage, originally from Gaoliu hamlet. Gaoliu hamlet, moreover, was located 10 *li* away from the main waterway. Gaoliu hamlet’s residents had difficulty in taking advantage of the timber transport monopoly themselves, and so they allowed Gui’e hamlet to have a use of their share of the monopoly rights in exchange for a “rent” of 3.8 taels of silver. The stele states that the two villages recorded this agreement in a contract.¹³⁸

Gaoliu’s population grew rapidly over the eighteenth century. The surrounding area obtained regular flows of cash from the timber trade. Segments of the village population began to aspire to participation in the imperial education system, and established endowments for village academies. The Gaoliu academy stele from 1782, which names 62 contributors to the school, claims that “[although] it is located in a remote mountain top, it had obtained all the necessities in adequate quantities [*yi shi po zu*].”¹³⁹ This reflects the broader impact of the Qingshui river timber trade on the region, helping create economically viable villages in the hinterland that were attached to the Qing commercial economy.

By 1811, villagers wanted to participate directly in the transportation of timber, and break the original agreement with Gui’e. Villagers from Gaoliu went to their supervising native chieftain, the Hu’er native chieftaincy, to appeal for a change of the local timber transport

¹³⁶ YZF, 292.

¹³⁷ “Babu jianggui,” JPLB, 35.

¹³⁸ YZF, 292.

¹³⁹ Yao Chichang ed., *Jinping beiwen xuanji*, (Jinping: Jinping yinshuachang, 1997), 29.

monopoly in their favor. The Hu'er native chieftain gave them a favorable arrangement. The native chieftaincy wrote up a contract stating that Gaoliu would receive the right to monopolize timber transportation for eight years at a time, after which Gui'e hamlet would receive a one year monopoly, furnished with the native chieftain's official seal. At the time, Gaoliu hamlet had two hundred households and Gui'e hamlet had forty households, and the division of the transport monopoly, if it was to be based solely on population, strongly favored Gaoliu. A division strictly based on population would have meant that Gaoliu received the monopoly for five years, and Gui'e for one year.

The Xiangs of Gui'e hamlet were unhappy with the agreement that the native chieftain produced. They initially commissioned a middleman to forge a compromise, but this effort did not produce results. They then leapfrogged the native chieftaincy by directly filing a plaint at Liping prefecture, claiming that the Xiangs of Gaoliu hamlet were not bona fide relatives, and that the monopoly thus belonged solely to the ancestors of the Xiangs in Gui'e. The prefect gathered the parties for an investigation. Having found their genealogies to be linked, and that Gui'e was only a hamlet of only twenty households in the early Qianlong reign, the prefect decided to overrule both the native chieftain's decision and the old contract of agreement between Gui'e and Gaoliu, adding that the original agreement never had the prefecture's endorsement in the first place. Instead, the prefect ruled that the monopoly was to be arranged in closer alignment to their current relative populations of two hundred households in Gaoliu and forty households in Gui'e. Gui'e would receive the transport monopoly for one year, and Gaoliu would receive two years in a three year monopoly cycle.¹⁴⁰

This case represents the main underlying changes in the Qingshui river area over the eighteenth century. The Hu'er native chieftain believed that it was within their powers to

¹⁴⁰ YZF, 290-292.

apportion benefits and make binding decisions on disputes within their jurisdiction. Their ruling strongly favored Gaoliu hamlet, while shifting income and employment away from Gui'e. Gui'e was expected to take the native chieftain's ruling as legitimate and binding, even as the origins of these rights were supposed to have been obtained from an authority separate from the native chieftain. Hu'er native chieftaincy, after all, was part of an old coalition that Qing officials built. Zhang Guangsi, in finding a successor to the native chieftaincy in 1741, noted its role in providing troops to suppress Yao and Miao rebels across the border south in Guangxi.¹⁴¹

Gui'e hamlet's residents, who were unsatisfied with the justice delivered by the current system of appeal through local actors like middlemen and chieftains, appealed directly to the prefecture. This incident represents how intra-chieftaincy conflict was no longer constrained within the bounds of hamlet-native chieftain interactions, with native chieftains relegated to a role of aids to the magistrate. A case involving rafters and merchants in 1822, a decade after this case, shows that although an incident happened "within Hu'er tusi's jurisdiction," they were only handed the task of assisting in investigation and arrest.¹⁴² Hamlet elites since the early Qing had developed the capacity to directly interface with officials and circumvent native chieftain authority in pursuit of their own interests by writing complaints, commemorating official concessions, re-orienting state-society links away from the native chieftains and into their hands as brokers. This case shows how broker-elites had changed in terms of their capacity to fulfill such a role. Gui'e resident Xiang Zongkai, who we can consider part of the literate and moneyed elite milieu of the Qingshui river basin, demonstrated an ability to cite documents like lineage genealogies, while retaining traditional links of kinship and place that placed them in a

¹⁴¹ "Ti wei qing Yang Yingxiong chengxi Guizhou Liping fu shu Hu'er si fu tuguan shi," 02-01-006-000408-0016, FHA.

¹⁴² "Ti wei Liping fu min ren Jiang Laowu bei zei xingjie ming'an xian man zeizang wei huo te can Hu'er tusi zheng zhangguan Yang Zheng deng shufang ge yuan shi," 02-01-03-09247-021, FHA.

representative position for their village. He showed an ability to deal with competing litigation channels, and make use of vocabulary that made sense in the historical context of southeastern Guizhou to try and win their case, even if they did not fully succeed in the end.¹⁴³

The diminished role of native chieftains in dispute resolution was accompanied by the disruption of their role in the provision of other intermediary services for villagers. A series of steles that were roughly contemporary with the Gaoliu-Gui'e case commemorates conflicts on these matters between Liping prefecture and the local native chieftains. Locals in Bianhuang state that although these steles are now scattered, they were once located together in the village drum tower, the physical center of social life in Dong villages and village leagues.¹⁴⁴

One of these steles records a proclamation by the Liping prefect, dated to 1838. The prefect states in this proclamation that since taking up his new post, he had been inundated with complaints about native chieftains taking up cases and dispatching government functionaries. These actions, he notes, were violations of Qing law. Native chieftains were to be prohibited from taking any litigation fees, including for litigation involving Miao subjects. Miao subjects who were once charged fees to have the native chieftains serve as middlemen were encouraged to file their cases directly at the prefectural office, and to report offending chieftains for punishment.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ This is not an isolated observation. See also Xu Xiaoguang and Xu Bin, "Ming-Qing shiqi Qingshui jiang;" Long Zejiang et al., "Mucui maoyi;" Yang Yougeng et al., *Kishū Byōzoku*. A key piece of context here is that as many villages in southeastern Guizhou received cash from commercial ties with the rest of the empire, they also started establishing private schools, one of many vehicles for the circulation of knowledge on the Qing administrative system and its documentary forms. Gaoliu and Gui'e were indeed among the villages for which we have records documenting the establishment of private academies in the Qianlong reign, crediting the new income from timber cultivation for the establishment of schools. The Qing public school system, in contrast, probably played a marginal role in education for indigenous villages. Yang Yougeng, "Han Minzu Dui Kaifa Qingshuijiang Shaoshu Minzu Linqi de Yingxiang Yu Zuoyong (Xia)," *Guizhou Minzu Yanjiu* 55, no. 3 (1993): 138–44.

¹⁴⁴ SSLS, 53-57.

¹⁴⁵ YZF, 290-292.

This stele comes in the context of several other conflicts that came in the decades prior. In 1828, “Miao subjects” (*Miaomin*) were given a general directive to send all their litigation to local officials for decisions. The native officials were prohibited from “once more wantonly handling [the cases], and illicitly installing tools of torture.” In 1837, the prefect, “hearing that in recent years, the native chieftains have been extravagant and prosperous (*shechi fanhua*), and growing in number with each passing generation, know only the exploitation of the Miao subjects...colluding with the evil runners to add surcharges upon the tax grain of the Miao.”¹⁴⁶

Unlike the contemporary cases from Gaoliu and Gui’e, these proclamations were not rooted in a problem specific to the village. They addressed the prefect’s general frustrations with the native chieftain’s place in regional society at the time. Nevertheless, they identified points of friction between the native chieftaincies, indigenous villages, and Qing administration. Native chieftaincies placed themselves in an intermediary position between village and magistrate, handling litigation and tax collections in exchange for fees. Meanwhile, this position was imperiled by indigenous villagers who were able to bypass the native chieftaincies and make direct contact with the Liping prefect. They made demands upon the Qing magistrate for themselves in forms that were readily legible for officials who dealt with them as centrally administered units. These proclamations suggested that the native chieftains could be dispensed with by the villagers. If this was indeed the case, and indigenous elites followed through to leapfrog the native chieftains in their routine interactions with the prefecture, the proclamations would have marked a momentous period in the incorporation of Liping prefecture, with the outflanking of the native chieftains, and the consolidation of direct interaction between indigenous villagers and Qing magistrates.

¹⁴⁶ SSLS, 53-54.

While changes occurred in the relative flow of cases and taxes between Qing magistrates, native chieftains, and traditional alternatives like the village compacts cannot be determined precisely, we can ascertain that the number of interactions with the prefect office, as measured by the number of documents of all kinds produced that indicate direct interaction between villagers and Qing officials, clearly increased over time.¹⁴⁷ Native chieftains were becoming less and less vital to the administration of villages in Liping prefecture, a historical shift that was securely in place by the middle of the nineteenth century, even as the condition of the native chieftains in the region saw considerable variation. Many native chieftaincies in southeastern Guizhou limped forward into the Republican period, though they gradually lost their functions over time and long since ceased to serve as intermediaries for the Qing state in their jurisdictions.¹⁴⁸ In 1840, two years after the proclamation by prefect Zhang to push the native chieftains out of the litigation system, Yang Zaiting inherited the Hu'er native chieftaincy. He was to be the last recorded Hu'er native chieftain, with no further successors inheriting the post, as village-based militias led by the new indigenous broker-elites emerged as more important anchors to the security of the region in subsequent crises.¹⁴⁹

From the Archives: The Transitional Decades towards a Contractual Society

The transition towards a contractual society in the villages of the Qingshui river basin can be seen in two cases from the Ping'ao hamlet found in the *xingke tiben*, set apart by thirty four

¹⁴⁷ Steles from *YZF*, in Wendou hamlet, shows that recorded incidents demonstrating some form of intervention or interaction with Qing officials began in the second half of the eighteenth century, and peaked in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While Wendou hamlet is exceptional in the depth of its involvement with the timber trade, and therefore its wealth and level of education, the trend here falls in line with the rough temporal distribution of documents we see in other villages.

¹⁴⁸ Wu Caimao, "Tusi de xiaowang zhi lu: Qingdai Chixinandong Si gaitu guiliu hou cunfei Wenti zaibian," *Qinghai Minzu Yanjiu* 32, no. 3 (2021): 20–27.

¹⁴⁹ Liao Yaonan, "Liping, Jinping, Congjiang zhangguansi kaolue," *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* 4 (1985): 27.

years.¹⁵⁰ The First Historical Archive's catalog does not tag *xingke tiben* cases with the villages involved. Catalog titles included the originating district, the name of the accused, and basic details about the circumstances of the case. I have found these two cases by searching for all the cases originating from Liping prefecture in which the accused was surnamed Jiang [姜], knowing that there was a higher probability that these cases originated from the single-surname villages important to the timber trade like Wendou and Ping'ao. These two cases add texture to, and confirm the more generalizable quantitative data from contractual records, which show a large increase in contract writing beginning in the final decades of the eighteenth century.

In the autumn of 1771, the hamlet elders [*zhaitou* 寨头] Jiang Mingde of Ping'ao and Jiang Wenxia of Peizan, together with the father of the murder victim Yang Jianbao reported to the prefectural yamen that a thirty-nine year old, Yang Keming, was murdered in a dispute over a paddy field tenancy. The paddy field in question, named Wujindui, was one *mu* large, and was bought by Jiang Laobao in 1761 for four taels of silver. The field was flooded, silted, and abandoned in 1765 by Jiang Laobao, who had since been away, moving between different villages to work as a wage laborer. In 1770, the victim Yang Keming rehabilitated the paddy field, and claimed to have spent 1.7 taels of silver in his effort. In that year, he managed to harvest two *shi* of rice, and recovered his initial investment by the first year.

In the following year, Jiang Laobao returned home and saw Yang Keming harvesting rice from his field. He recognized Yang's investment in the field, and permitted him to harvest rice for the year, but asserted that he would take ownership and cultivate his field again in the following year. When planting seedlings in the third month, Yang Keming visited to make a claim that he had a right to keep the harvest in the autumn, a claim that Jiang ignored. By the

¹⁵⁰ “Ti wei shenli Liping fu Miaomin Jiang Laobao bei zu ge he shang bi Yang Keming yi an yi lü ni jiao jian hou qing zhi shi 题为审理黎平府苗民姜老包因被阻割禾稻伤毙杨科名一案依律拟绞监候请旨事,” 1772, FHA 02-01-07-06751-002.

time the rice had ripened in the eighth month, Yang had come again, and attempted to prevent Jiang from harvesting the rice. Jiang and Yang got into a scuffle, and Jiang struck Yang with his wooden carrying pole on the left temple. Yang's uncle, who was returning to Ping'ao from the market, found him bleeding to death on the ground. Jiang, who wished to emphasize his ownership over the field, produced not a paper contract, but a wooden carving [*muke* 木刻] recording the original transaction.

This was a case between two people who were labeled Miao subjects [*Miaomin* 苗民]. Nevertheless the case was adjudicated under standard Qing procedures and law, not the Miao sub-statutes. The Liping magistrate recommended upon reviewing the case:

“Examining the law on assault and homicide, those who beat and kill a person, regardless of whether using hands, feet, other objects, or bladed weapons, shall all be sentenced to strangulation and imprisonment awaiting execution. It is appropriate that Jiang Laobao be judged according to the law on beating a person to death, and sentenced to death by strangulation and imprisonment, to be executed after the autumn assizes [查律载关殴杀人者不问手足他物金刃并绞监候等语姜老包合依关殴杀人律拟绞监候秋后处决].”¹⁵¹

This case marked the progress in incorporating the Qingshui river basin villages and its non-Han subjects, who now came under full jurisdiction of the Qing, at least by the middle of the century. However, in some aspects, this case also suggested that there was still some way to go before a Miao village could be administered in a fashion no different from any other in China proper. There was no *baojia* registration, and reporting was conducted through the hamlet elder. And contracts were yet to be produced in the fashion that was recognizable in the rest of the empire.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The following case in Ping'ao, shows us that these conditions had changed, just when we see contracts appear in larger numbers in the database. In the autumn of 1805, thirty four years after the previous case, the Ping'ao *baojia* head Jiang Changju received a report from a locally-registered subject (a *jiamin* 甲民), Jiang Wenhong, that a man named Jiang Wensheng was murdered by the son of a Hunanese migrant, Yang Fuqi.

Jiang Wensheng and his family owned a plot of land that seems to have been located on a mountain. Yang Fuqi, a fifty-nine year old man who originally came from Huitong county, Hunan, heard (apparently by word of mouth) that Jiang Wensheng had a plot available for rent. Yang moved to Guizhou to make a living as a tenant farmer, and at the time was located in Niuchong village. Jiang Wensheng refused Yang's offer to rent the land in the spring because Yang was a recent migrant [*yin ta shi Hunan ren banlai weijiu* 因他是湖南人搬来未久], and told Yang that he needed to give it more thought.¹⁵² When Yang passed by the plot in the autumn however, and saw that maize was being harvested, he felt wronged, and argued with the current tenant, who was a kinsman of Jiang Wensheng. Jiang Wensheng was unhappy about the incident, and visited Yang Fuqi's home, where they got into an argument, and threatened to slaughter Yang's pig as compensation. During this argument, Yang Fuqi's son stabbed Jiang Wensheng in the left rib, and Wensheng died shortly after. While we cannot say this with absolute certainty, the Jiang Wensheng who was murdered, and whose case appeared in the central archives may have also appeared in the contracts that were preserved and recently published. A Jiang Wensheng appears in two separate contracts from Ping'ao hamlet, dated 1796 and 1801, a plausible distance from the time at which the Jiang Wensheng in the Board of Punishment archives appears. They show a man who held some property with his brothers and kinsmen,

¹⁵² “Ti wei huishen Guizhou Liping fu kemin Yang Yifa yin dian zhong fenzheng chuo si Jiang Wensheng yi an yi lu ni jiao jian hou qing zhi shi 题为会审贵州黎平府客民杨仪发因佃种纷争戳死姜文升一案依律拟绞监候请旨事,” 1806, FHA 02-01-07-09171-006.

clarified the borders of these shared properties with other landowners, and hired tenants who could cultivate these lands with *shanmu*. Socially, we might locate him in the strata of Qingshui river basin villagers who spent most of their time in agriculture, but also held shares in forest lands that could be leased to outsiders, and worked in seasonal timber-related occupations.¹⁵³

We see in this case that *baojia* registration and organization had been established as the main reporting and policing mechanism. *Miaomin* was dropped as a legal identity in favor of fully incorporated *jiamin*. Migrants from Hunan were flowing in, looking for land to rent from indigenous villagers. And though this case does not tell us how the transactions were made, it is perhaps safe to assume that the parties were by now familiar with Qing documentary forms, and used these to record agreements of land sales and tenancies, even among kin. Moreover, *baojia* appears to have persisted in Ping'ao hamlet. Another case from 1820 once again relies on the report of a named *baozhang* for the investigation of murder case over an unpaid loan.¹⁵⁴ Still, in other ways, incorporation was incomplete. As we will see in the following chapters, the Liping district magistrates continued to preserve a space for difference through customary privileges for traders and laborers. And to fully displace the native chieftains and their role as military allies in times of war, the Qing had to go further and find a place for the *kuanyue* trans-village compacts.

Conclusion

The early to mid-Qing dynasty was a time of great social change for southeastern Guizhou and its inhabitants. Indigenous hamlets and their elites grew in political, cultural and economic

¹⁵³ “Jiang Wensheng, Jiang Wenyu, Jiang Tingju fenjiezi 姜文升, 姜文玉, 姜廷举分界字,” 址 3-2-2-013, QJSJS 2.2, 154; “Jiang Wensheng deng li zhaotie hetong 姜文升等立招帖合同,” 3-1-2-024, QJSJS 2.1, 209. Note that there is a difference between the character for *sheng* used in the Board of Punishment and the Ping'ao documents, but given these documents come from the same village and time, and how inconsistencies in the writing of place and person names are not unusual, I think it is plausible that these documents all refer to the same Jiang Wensheng.

¹⁵⁴ “Ti wei shenli Liping Fu minren Jiang Menglian yin yu ge tiangu di qian zhi xin ou bi Wang Dengyuan yi an yi lu ni jiao jianhou qing zhi yuanmian shi 题为审理黎平府民人姜梦连因欲割田谷抵欠致衅殴毙王登沅一案依律拟绞监候请旨援免事,” 1820, 02-01-07-10287-008, FHA.

capacities at the expense of their native chieftain counterparts, building on new institutions and connections with outside markets. The result, eventually, was that the native chieftains were disintermediated. Their classic roles as agents of indirect imperial rule was diminished, as both hamlets and officials directly began to directly interface with each other to protect their own interests. There was surely great variation in outcomes beyond the sample of littoral hamlets from the lower Qingshui river basin I have covered here. Some native chieftaincies endured down to the closing days of the Qing, and the treatment of hamlets differed by administrative unit. But the basic conditions that led to the demise of the native chieftaincy in southeastern Guizhou were widely shared and help explain the relative success in the “regularization” of imperial administration in this area.

In the first place, the native chieftaincy was already reliant on both the Qing and its own indigenous subordinates for political and economic power. Hamlets and hamlet alliances, functionally independent from their supervising unit, might appeal to alternative sources of authority to defend or promote their more particularistic interests. The institution of the native chieftaincy, at least in southeastern Guizhou, was clearly a precarious outpost of governance, easily subjected to challenges from its subordinates and its imperial superiors.

More fundamentally, the capacities of the native chieftaincy’s rivals had changed. Han migrants who assimilated into indigenous villages, indigenous villagers who borrowed the customs and claims of Han newcomers, and a budding crop of elites who were put through schools funded by silver inflows from the timber trade created new potential brokers between an expanding Qing empire and indigenous society. It is in this way that despite the limited success of the campaign to conquer the Miao frontier by the Yongzheng emperor, we began to see the hamlet indigenes as subjects who who interfaced directly with the Qing empire, offering

submission of taxes, and writing contracts that utilized ideas and forms that were considered legitimate in China proper among themselves. These changes served as the long prelude to the rise of the indigenous village elites who built their material fortune and social dominance in the much larger timber booms of later years.

The case of the Miao of southeastern Guizhou stands as an example of how the genre of “popular documents” (*minjian ziliao*), covering a wide array of primary sources like steles, contracts, genealogies, records of disputes and declarations produced by non-state actors, might be used to revise our accepted periodizations or casts of relevant actors. The *kuan*, the hamlet leaders, the Miao lineages, single Han males, and contract writers of different backgrounds have remained mostly invisible in histories of the Qing, and it is only now that we hear their voices, see how they were organized, and consider how they might have played a role in these histories themselves in the English-language literature. On the other hand, from the standpoint of periodization, these new sources have been powerful tools for interrogating the claims, categories, and accounts of state-actors, from which units have been successfully placed under “regular” administration by a given time, to what impact state policies had on their intended targets on the ground rather than on paper.

The new Miao elites of southeastern Guizhou might also be used as a case with which to reconsider the question of how the Qing empire forged links with grassroots society, both in China proper, and in the empire’s peripheries like the current case. Previous studies have rightly rejected simplistic dichotomies of central versus local, or imposition and resistance, by focusing on the actual links between state and society, from how they came to be, to how they were sustained, and how they fell apart.¹⁵⁵ This study showed new state-society linkages in their

¹⁵⁵ Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); David Faure and Ts’ui P’ing Ho, *Chieftains into Ancestors:*

formative stage, where competitive power dynamics compelled useful congruences between empires and indigenes.¹⁵⁶ Chief among these congruences, as we have seen, were the privileged market brokerages and service monopolies, but these extended to other areas, including kinship, with both Qing officials and Miao elites embedding themselves in the kinship systems of their counterparts. The contracts formed another such link, as Miao elites, in legitimizing their emergent position in society as landowners, appropriated the idiom of the Qing state, using its categories, terminologies, and documentary forms as the framing for their action.¹⁵⁷ These were not simply instances of “state mimicry,” the copying of civilizational forms as a means of simultaneous resistance and submission, by which peoples at the periphery kept at bay an encroaching state.¹⁵⁸ The contracts, just like the crucial hinges between state and society of lineage, market, or religion, represented the adoption of new symbols and norms, and their embedding local in networks and organizations, here embedded in indigenous customary legal systems, on which Qing law and its magistrates were grafted, as growing disputes over property occasionally exposed the limits of the old system in resolving disputes internally, paving the way for a more complete incorporation of southeastern Guizhou by the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁹

Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

¹⁵⁶ This idea of “useful congruences” in frontier areas with competitive power dynamics is taken from Richard White’s concept of the middle ground. See the preface of Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁷ Nicholas Herriman and Monika Winarnita, “Seeking the State: Appropriating Bureaucratic Symbolism and Wealth in the Margins of Southeast Asia,” *Oceania* 86, no. 2 (2016): 132–50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ See Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 15-41. See also the flexible approaches to incorporation taken in David Faure and Ts’ui P’ing Ho eds., *Chieftains into Ancestors*.

CHAPTER 3: REWARDING THE INDUSTRIOUS: TIMBER CULTIVATION, TRADE, AND ELITE FORMATION

Introduction

By the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Qingshui river basin's forests had been enclosed and mobilized to produce regular harvests of timber for export. A new crop of indigenous elites rose alongside timber plantations, displacing officially appointed native chieftains in social, political, and economic primacy over the region. In their endeavors, they were helped by the Qing state's continued affirmation of protective local customs, which prevented outsiders from participating in the timber industry. However, the engines that powered the rise of new indigenous elites are only vaguely understood in the present literature. Little is known about the relative importance of timber cultivation relative to other timber-related activities, such as trading or brokerage, in elite formation.¹⁶⁰

This chapter seeks to account for the rise of new elites on the Qing empire's frontiers. Improvements in state reach and capacity were crucial components of the great encroachment upon the world's forests that began in the early modern period.¹⁶¹ Understanding how economically viable state surrogates were established in new territories is thus key to understanding the Qing's own dynamic of frontier expansion. Indigenous elites, as we will see in later chapters, served as informal anchors of state rule amidst the nearly continuous crises of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from the Opium Wars, to regional rebellions, economic depression, regime change, and globalization, when they served as local constabularies and militia organizers. It was upon the accumulations these elites had built amidst the scramble for

¹⁶⁰ Shan Honggen 单洪根, *Jinping Wenshu Yu Qingshuijiang Mushang Wenhua* 锦屏文书与清水江木商文化 (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 2017); Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucui Zhi Liudong: Qingdai Qingshuijiang Mucui Xiaoyou Diqu de Shichang, Quanli, Yu Shehui* 木材之流动: 清代清水江下游地区的市场, 权利, 与社会, (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006).

¹⁶¹ John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

timber in the early nineteenth century that later regimes drew upon to preserve a semblance of regional order.

I will be presenting in this chapter aggregate, descriptive data on the regional timber trade from 1736 to 1955, based on 1130 buy-and-sell contracts stored in the family archives of elite families of the Qingshui river basin. These contracts will identify major trends in the timber industry over time, allowing us to set individual cases against a wider historical backdrop. Alongside this aggregate data, I will also engage in closer readings of select contract texts to try and get a sense of the timber production business from the perspective of the individual household or shareholder. They show the long-term challenges of maintaining the timber cultivation business, despite the favorable geographic conditions of the region, and strong demand from deforested provinces downstream. This data is also suggestive of the persistent importance of traditional timber cultivation techniques and trade organizations as China's economy modernized in the twentieth century, in line with recent work on how industries and technologies rooted in the organic economy, from handicrafts to human-powered machines, were foundational to economic modernization.¹⁶²

Overall, I will attempt to illustrate here the structural forces that shaped the emergence of indigenous elites over two centuries: The great annual movements of timber and silver in the early nineteenth century, the ensuing declines, and the slow annual growth of tree saplings that condemned timberland owners and their tenants to poor economic returns despite their use of intensive forestry techniques. However, in order to first set the stage, I will begin at the human scale, with the biography of a Miao trader based on oral histories and lineage genealogies collated by local scholars in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹⁶² See for example Yujie Li, "Wheels and Sweat: Muscle-Powered Transportation in the Everyday Life of Maoist China, 1949-1979," (Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 2022).

The Rise of a Timber Baron: Jiang Shichao of Wendou Village

Late autumn marked the beginning of a busy season for Wendou hamlet. Sources written in the Qing did not leave us with any clue of how workers and traders perceived this world from their interior, what hopes and anxieties this season brought upon their minds. We do get a sense, however, for the texture of the exterior world which they inhabited: Axes thumping in steady cadence against fir trees, echoing in the river valley, and merchants marching up and down the riverside trails, carrying the cloth bags filled with silver for which they were known.¹⁶³

In 1805, the valleys fell silent. The Qingshui river was blockaded by the Wang lineage from Benchu hamlet, arresting the seasonal flow of timber downstream. Benchu hamlet had a long history of attempts to seize a share of the timber business flowing past the river, and this blockade was the most serious of their attempts. The timber trade was ordinarily monopolized by three Miao hamlets upstream from Benchu. The monopoly held by the three Miao hamlets was a concession granted after the Yongzheng conquest to appease the Miao and serve as their “perpetual occupation” (*Miao ren heng ye* 苗人恒业).¹⁶⁴ This area also served as an ethnic border between Miao and Han areas. Benchu had been contesting the monopolies for as long as the historical record stretched backward. In the past, Benchu residents have tried sending appeals to official *yamen* asking that a separate trading post be set up, strong-arming the Han trading *bangs* to divert some of their business to the village.

¹⁶³ This description is based on a passage in *Qiannan Shilüe* [hereafter QNSL], juan 21, 9a which describes the soundscape of the Qingshui river valley. The specific passage reads as follows: “郡內自清江一下至茅坪二百里兩岸翼雲承日無隙土無漏陰棟樑桷之材靡不備具坎坎之聲鏗訇空谷商賈絡繹於道編巨筏放之大江轉運於江淮間者產於此也。” Several sources reports that the period from the eighth month to the second month of the following year as the time for cutting, land clearing, and moving timber, following the seasonality of water levels. See Wu Zhonglun, *Shanmu* 404-417; Shan Honggen, *Jinping wenshu yu Qingshuijiang linye shihua* 锦屏文书与清水江林业史话, (Beijing: Beijing zhengfa daxue chubanshe, 2017), 41-58.

¹⁶⁴ Guizhou sheng bianji zu, *Dongzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha* 侗族社会历史调查 [hereafter DSLD], (Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 1988), 63; LPFZ, juan 3a, 33a.

Everyone in the timber industry, from the merchants to laborers, had to wait as the blockade went on, without any signs of an end. Timber already cut for expected buyers instead lay stuck in the mountains, waterways, and riverbanks. The uncertainty would have frozen the whole chain of activities from logging, to rafting, land clearing and re-planting that consumed the population's energy between the busy periods of the autumn harvest and spring seedling preparations. In this time between late autumn and early spring, the land was customarily left fallow, and planters were left to find other economic activities. The interruption in the seasonal movement of timber would have left many people in the Qingshui river basin with nothing to do.¹⁶⁵

Jiang Shichao of Wendou hamlet was one possible casualty of the 1805 timber blockade, left underemployed by the stoppage in the movement of timber. He was born in 1759, and grew up in difficult circumstances, having been orphaned at the age of two by his father, a silversmith. He worked with his mother on the timber plantations as a child, as was typical for the poor and landless in the region.¹⁶⁶

By the time of the blockade, Shichao already managed to assemble some property. He took advantage of the paralysis in the market to purchase timber at large discounts using the savings his family had accumulated. He took out loans that used precious rice fields as collateral. Shichao used this money to purchase a large supply of timber in a 25-30 kilometer stretch of the lower Qingshui river basin, a potentially ruinous gamble for his household if the blockade was not lifted in the timely manner he made a wager on.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ The customary staple crop in southeastern Guizhou was glutinous rice (*nuomi*), which ripened late and whose harvest consumed a lot of labor. This left the winter season too short for another crop. Hence fields were typically left fallow in the winter. Planters had to find other alternative activities. Qing officials tried to change both practices (*nuomi* cultivation and winter fallowing) with limited success. LPFZ juan 3b, 1b-2b; Yan Qiyang, "Neidihua yu qingshuijiang liuyu de 'nuo gai xian' 内地化与清水江流域的'糯改粳,'" *Zhongguo Nongshi*, no. 1 (2014): 39–45.

¹⁶⁶ JPXZ 1317.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Shichao was extraordinarily fortunate. The Jiaqing emperor quickly resolved the blockade in the following autumn of 1806. One of the blockade ringleaders, a man named Liu Xiugang, scurried out to Beijing to make a case directly to the emperor. In response, the emperor issued a decree assigning the case to the Guizhou governor, who re-affirmed the status quo supporting the three Miao brokerage hamlets. The blockade ringleader was then exiled, and condemned to slavery in the bitter cold of Heilongjiang province.¹⁶⁸ The merchants who remained on the sidelines during the crisis returned to the Miao timber markets to find that the sellers had the upper hand. Jiang Shichao was said to have been able to sell his supply for two to three times his cost of purchase, and in an instant, he became one of the richest men in Wendou and the lower Qingshui basin. He and his descendants bought up timberlands and rice fields across the region, including much of the available land in Wendou itself. From that point on, they took on a leading position in the hamlet, and served as the local surrogate of Qing rule, helping build public infrastructure, funding Confucian educations, and serving as militia organizers in the chaos of the Xianfeng-Tongzhi rebellions.¹⁶⁹ What was merely a well-endowed household in the 1700s became, by the 1800s, a catchment for regional resources, and one of the linchpins of Qing military, administrative, and ideological control in the littoral areas of southeastern Guizhou.

How to Make a Tree: Inputs in Timber Cultivation

For most households in the region, the timber industry provided opportunities for seasonal wage labor in transportation and cultivation, generating cash supplements to household incomes. Jiang Shichao, who was able to assemble some of his own capital before becoming one of the greatest timber merchants of the Qingshui river basin, was a beneficiary of this trend. How did Jiang advance from petty landowner into the class of Qing dynasty's rural elites?

¹⁶⁸ LPFZ juan 3a, 33a-34a.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Rural elites in the Qing have been defined in previous scholarship by their access to educational resources leading to officialdom, and to economic resources that permitted not just a life of leisure, but also the provision of village public goods.¹⁷⁰ The problem of social mobility strategies and the generation of gentry wealth in the Qing is an old one. Were the paths to gentry status in the Qing widest when one went through land, office, or commerce?¹⁷¹ As we will see from an attempt to reconstruct timber cultivation and harvesting practices, and some speculative approximations of how much owners made from timber cultivation based on both these reconstructions and contracts, the main driver of elite formation in the Qingshui river basin was unlikely to have been just the growing and selling of timber itself. Among the different economic activities available to people in the Qingshui river basin in the Qing, the trade in timber and consumer goods was the most likely path to elite status for villagers from the nineteenth century onwards, paths that were built upon the customary relationship between state and indigene in the region.

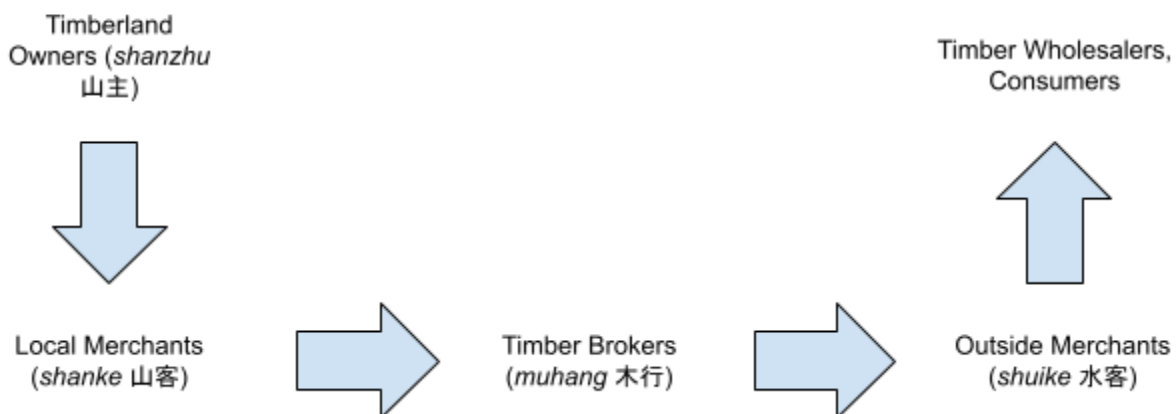
I will attempt to demonstrate this point in this section of the chapter through a reconstruction of the timber cultivation industry and its returns. I will go through the different inputs to timber cultivation, among them land, seedlings, tenants, wages, and labor. In the following section, I will then present estimates of returns in timber cultivation, and discuss the limitations of sources

¹⁷⁰ Here I follow Susan Mann in thinking of local gentry-merchants (the *shenshang*) as a combined class, defined not by formal occupation or title, but primarily wealth and leisure. Susan Mann, *Local Merchants and the Chinese Bureaucracy, 1750-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 21-23.

¹⁷¹ G. William Skinner, "Mobility Strategies in Late Imperial China: A Regional Systems Analysis," in Carol A. Smith, ed., *Regional Analysis, Vol 1, Economic Systems*, (New York, 1976): 356-358; Chang Chung-li, *The Income of the Chinese Gentry*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962); Hilary Beattie, *Land and Lineage in China: A Study of Tongchung County, Anhui*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Harriet Zurndorfer, "The Hsin-an ta-tsu chih and the development of Chinese gentry society," *T'oung pao* 67.3 (1981): 154-215.

and the resulting estimates. The very small number of contracts that we can even use for such an exercise, and the incompleteness of information on what timberland shares represent, timberland plot size, and the actual number of cuttings and plantings accomplished, by necessity, makes this a dangerous exercise fraught with assumptions on the interpretation of the sources. However, I will argue that what can be pieced together is sufficient to conclude that returns to cultivation were low, even at the peak of the timber trade, and that we must look at other explanations for the rise of new elites in the Qingshui river basin.

Figure 2: The Structure of the Timber Industry



There were four industry segments which can be identified in local sources. These follow the long journey of trees downstream from cultivation, to cutting and transport. Forest owners and cultivators sat at the very rear of this chain. Their products were bought and harvested by upstream merchant traders called *shanke* 山客, literally “mountain guests,” who were responsible for purchases and transport down to the Miao border monopoly markets. The *shanke* then passed the timber onto the timber brokers (*hanghu* 行户) on the border monopoly markets. There, downstream Han timber merchant traders called *shuike* 水客, “water” or “river guests,”

negotiated through the brokers and sent the timber off on the remainder of its journey down the Yangzi river system. These categories were not watertight. Overlaps existed between the different segments, whether it was in terms of personnel, personal networks, or capital. Timber cultivation and upstream trading, for example, can be done simultaneously by the same people, as Jiang Shichao did in his time. Anything resembling vertical integration, with large trading firms in direct interface with primary producers, only came very late in the Qing dynasty.¹⁷²

Timber trading and brokerage operations were very capital intensive. Transportation of logs required large numbers of laborers paid in cash wages. Typically, multiple teams of pullers (four to eight for big logs, one to two for small ones) with specialized tools like pulling beams and nails dragged logs to the closest river shoreline.¹⁷³ Timber stands in hard to access areas required further investment in large tools like wooden slipways (*xiangdao/xianglu*). Transportation from the shoreline to the Miao timber markets will again need merchants who had the cash to pay skilled rafters who knew how to tie timber together and navigate past the intricacies of the waterways.¹⁷⁴ The amount of capital that merchants needed to move timber from stump to the brokerages was thus likely to have been considerable. It was this segment of the industry that most closely reflected the idea that Chinese forestry was typically a large and expensive undertaking.¹⁷⁵ The capital the merchants needed, if they did not supply it for themselves, was

¹⁷² Zhang Ming, Feng Tianliang and Zhou Yan, “Xian Tong zhi luan hou Qingshuijiang xiayou diqu ‘dangjiang’ zhidu de tiaozheng yu qianhua,” *Yuanshengtai minzu wenhua xuekan* 12.3 (2020): 36-45.

¹⁷³ QDNZZ, 51-53.

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter 2 of the dissertation on the formative stages of the Qingshui river basin timber industry.

¹⁷⁵ See for instance Wu Chengming and Xu Dixin, *Zhongguo zibenzhuyi de mengya*, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985), cited in Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

bundled together from their social network if they were a small trader, or sourced through the households which ran the timber monopolies at the borders if they were larger.¹⁷⁶

The volume of the timber trade saw major changes over time. The best proxy we have for timber trading activity from different periods are the records of timberland transactions, taken from buy-and-sell contracts in multiple villages from different parts of the Qingshui river basin. As we can see in Figure 3, the long-term peak of the timber market was in the early nineteenth century, in terms of both pricing, and the number of contracts written. After this, a multi-decade economic depression, compounded by multiple wars sapped the vitality of the market. A recovery only becomes discernible as we approach the twentieth century. This data in aggregate serves as a rough indicator not just of capital flows in the timber industry, but also of the level of prices that timber buyers and sellers dealt with in markets.

¹⁷⁶ Wang Jun, “Qing Xian-Tong bingxian zhi hou Qingshuijiang xiayou de shanke yu hanghu,” *Guangxi Minzu Daxue Xuebao (Zhexue Shehui Kexue Ban)* 38.2 (2016): 111-117.

Figure 3: Aggregate Contracts Produced

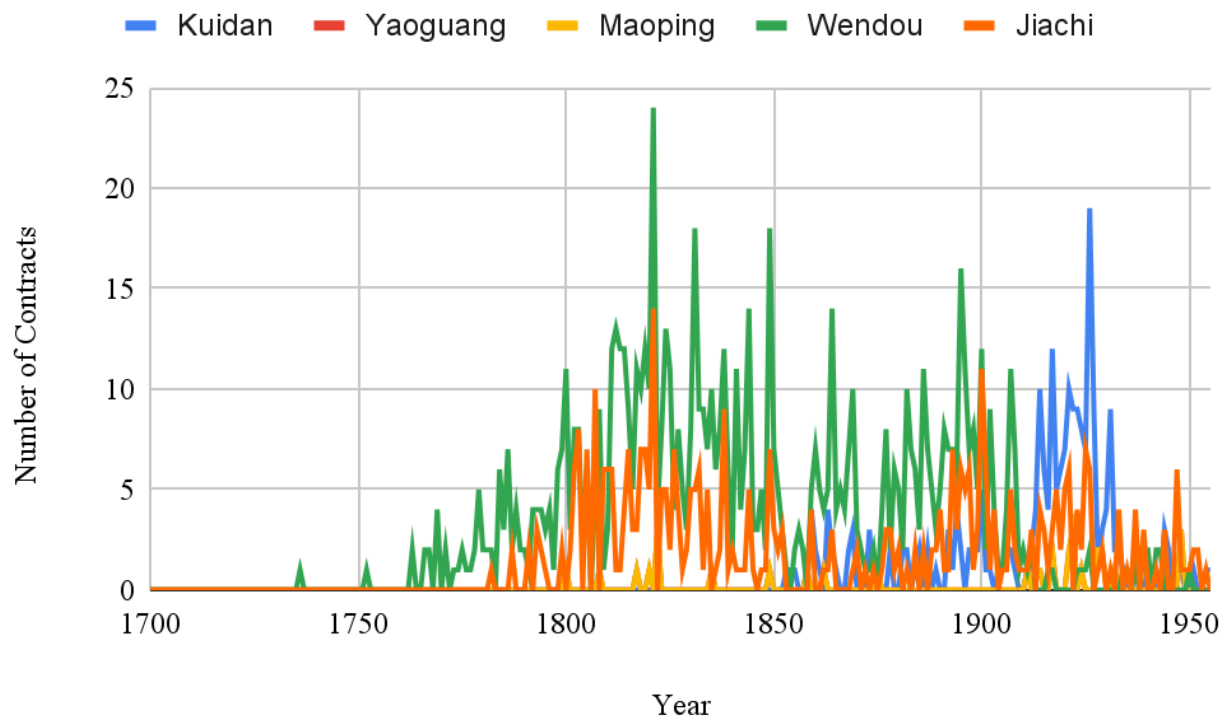
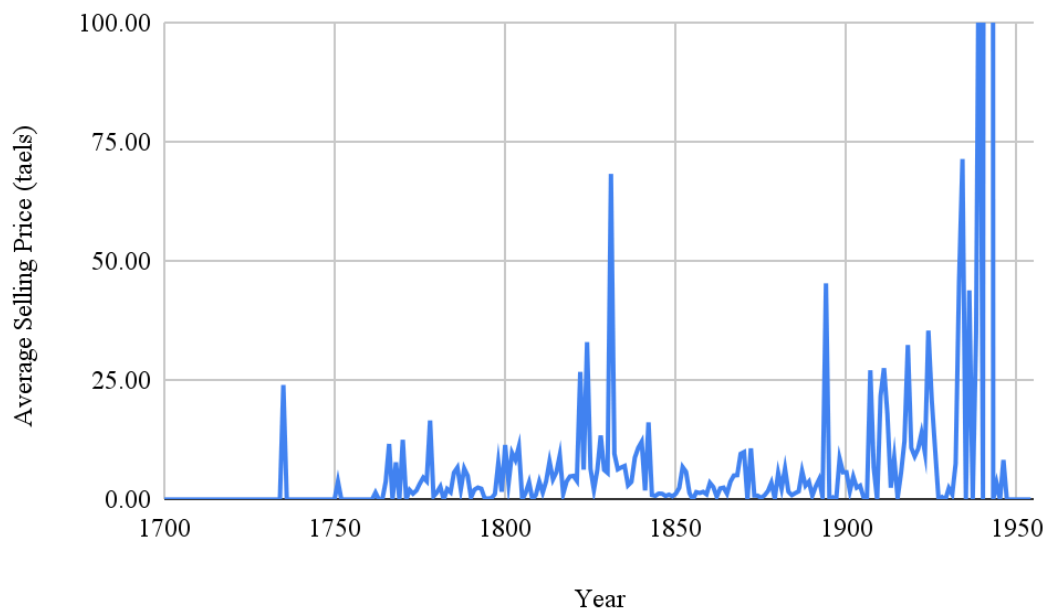


Figure 4: Average Selling Price - All Villages



In contrast with the capital intensity of trading, cultivation required little capital or labor. There were five major inputs that went into cultivation: land, seeds/seedlings, and labor for preparation, planting, and aftercare. The largest expense was the land itself. Prices varied greatly over time, but several taels of silver (typically somewhere from one to three taels for a small plot) was what one might expect to pay for an undivided plot.¹⁷⁷ In equivalent terms, this amounted to the annual supply of rice for one to two persons, depending on what land prices were like at the specific time period.¹⁷⁸ It was not uncommon for households to buy timberland plots, in lieu of silver, jewelry, or rice fields as a store of value. And because timberland plots were highly divisible, even households which did not have large amounts of savings could buy fractions of a plot.¹⁷⁹

Planting trees came after finding land. The most common method of propagation was the planting of cultivated *shanmu* seedlings. Other methods of propagation described elsewhere in the Qing empire, which relied on methods like the use of China fir cuttings stuck in the ground or coppicing, took even less labor than the seedling method, at the expense of survival rates and early growth of the tree's roots, which are crucial for its long term health.¹⁸⁰ None of the contracts that I have read state directly that the seedling and transplant method was used. However, both reports from the Republic and corroborating sources from the mid-Qing, mainly

¹⁷⁷ Qian Lin, "Qingshuijiang Liuyu Linye Jingji Zhidu Shi Yanjiu de Ji Ge Wenti — Qingshuijiang Wenshu Linqi Yanjiu Zhi San 清水江流域林业经济制度史研究的几个问题——清水江文书·林契研究之三," *Guizhou Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* 34, no. 5 (September 2016): 59–119.

¹⁷⁸ This assumes 1.48 taels per picul (*shi*) of rice in the area, a small plot was thus worth roughly if one takes the upper band of timberland prices as a basis.

¹⁷⁹ Rice price is for Liping prefecture, taken from the Appendix to Chapter 8 of James Lee, "The Political Economy of China's Southwestern Frontier: State Building and Economic Development, 1350-1850" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998). I assumed 90.72 kg of rice consumption per year, with one shi of rice equal to about 79.38-88.45 kg (175-195 lbs).

¹⁸⁰ Wu Zhonglun, *Shanmu*, 278-309.

gazetteers, suggest that the cultivation methods used in 20th century southeastern Guizhou were not novel to the area, hence the present consensus that the seedling method was dominant.¹⁸¹

The work to make seedlings can be as intensive as the planter wished it to be, but typically, landlords relied on their own labor or that of their tenants.¹⁸² It is possible that seedlings were bought in the market from specialized producers during the Qing, but the absence of even anecdotal references to such markets from contemporary sources suggests that most seedling cultivation was done independently, on-site. For timberland owners, this had the benefit of eliminating a need to expend cash, and weeding out seedlings that did not perform well in the specific environmental conditions of a plot.¹⁸³ When specialized seedling producers emerged later on, both as private producers in county seats, and as state-sponsored producers in places like experimental farms, the monetary cost of buying seedlings remained low.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Wu Zhonglun, *Shanmu*, 278-309; Christian Daniels, “Shimizu e Ryūiki No Byōzoku Ga Shokurin Wo Kaishi Kaishi Suru Made—Ringyō Keiei He to Karitateta Shoyōin 清水江流域の苗族が植林を開始するまで—林業経営へと駆り立てた諸要因,” in *Kishū Myaōzoku Ringyō Keiyaku Bunsho Kaihen (1736--1950-Nen)* vol. 3 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2001), 9–48.; Xu Xiaoguang, “Qingshuijiang Shanmu ‘shishengmiao’ Jishu de Lishi Yu Chuantong Nonglin Zhishi 清水江杉木‘实生苗’技术的历史与传统农林知识,” *Guizhou Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* 32, no. 4 (2014): 97–104.

¹⁸² As with agriculture more generally, one can always do more. Intensive seedling cultivation starts with the pre-selection of seeds based on physical markers of health. In the spring, land is cleared, weeds are eliminated, and a base layer of fertilizer is applied. Seeds are sown and covered with organic matter. After sprouting, fertilizer is applied. Sickly sprouts are removed, and the sprouts are left to grow for one year, after which their ability to withstand the stress of transplantation to a new forest plot reduces. The most involved cultivators may do several more rounds of burnings and applications of fertilizer Xu, “Qingshuijiang shanmu,” Wu Zhonglun, *Shanmu* 杉木, (Zhongguo Linye Chubanshe, 1983), 278-309.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Nurseries at the county level established in the Republican period by the Guizhou provincial government confirm that the costs of seedling cultivation were mostly likely not onerous. Somewhere between 16 to 25 yuan was spent per mu of seedling land, with over 80% of the cost going to labor. The seedlings themselves were sold in the market for 2 kilograms of rice for every 100 seedlings—a small fraction of estimated per capita consumption levels in the Republic, and certainly affordable for a landlord relative to the cost of land or timber crop shares. Xu, “Qingshuijiang shanmu,” Wu Zhonglun, *Shanmu*, 1-19.

What remains is to find the labor to prepare the land, transplant seedlings, and provide aftercare to the growing trees. In the early stages of forest commercialization, around the mid-1700s, this outlay was probably done by those who held the land themselves. As tenancy contracts began to emerge in the late-1700s, it appears that part of this burden was gradually taken from their hands and onto those of tenant foresters called “planting hands” or *zaishou* (栽手). Hiring tenants required no cash from landlords. None of the tenancy contracts from the Qing to the Republic involved the direct payment of wages. Instead, tenants (who were usually poor, single migrants) were compensated with the right to temporarily use the land for cultivation, and a share of the future proceeds of the timber crop. This was given to tenants in the form of timber harvest shares. The typical course would see a tenant plant millet or corn between freshly transplanted seedlings for three years, or until the canopy closes. Tenants were given preliminary contracts stating an agreed share, which were invalidated if they were not confirmed by a separate contract once the canopy had closed.¹⁸⁵

The first right served in place of cash compensation as the means by which the tenant can materially subsist on a day to day basis. Tenants were permitted explicitly to plant a foxtail millet crop, which grew alongside the freshly transplanted seedlings. Tenants would continue to plant subsistence crops for the first three years after transplantation, after which, their main task was to prune the young trees. By the fifth year, the canopy should have closed, and the tenant is regarded as having completed his main contractual obligation. Once again, there was no cash out on the part of the landlords. The burden of converting compensation to cash income fell on the tenants, who had to find buyers, decide on the timing of sale, and weigh the different risks of share ownership. Market prices for timber shares were fickle, and could change dramatically

¹⁸⁵ This is for contracts within the confines of the villages studied here. There may have been payments made in cash in other villages, or payments in grain that I have overlooked, but in any case, such cases are exceptional.

from year to year. Tenants, who bore these risks by accepting shares, might find themselves earning a smaller cash income that they initially expected upon signing a contract. On the other side, landlords, who often had a contractual right of first refusal, did not always exercise their right, and tenants may have to actively seek buyers through village middlemen.

Returns to Timber Cultivation

The family archives of indigenous villagers from across the Qingshui river basin show how people busied themselves with buying, selling, running, and quarreling over timber plantations. These contracts and dispute documents over timberlands constitute the overwhelming majority of sources in these archives. Evidence of other economic activities, including timber rafting, the planting of tung trees, the cultivation of rice, and the trade in sundries, all seem insignificant in numbers relative to timber plantations. However, their volumes were no indication of their importance to elite formation. Timber cultivation was a slow moving business in the Qing, bringing in modest quantities of silver over very long cycles, and it was fraught with all manner of risks that innovations in shareholding structure brought in from other timber-cultivating regions in China could not resolve. The elite families that became the region's largest landholders made their fortunes elsewhere.

Going through the collection of timber contracts, it is readily apparent that the returns they generated for their owners were not spectacular: Harvests and payments for shares were meager, especially if one considers the many decades between planting and harvests. However, the text within contracts does not make it possible to test this impression through statistical methods. The contracts give copious data on transaction prices, the residence of transacting parties, and fees for transaction brokers and scribes, but in the end they remained highly context-dependent sources whose meanings were hard to decipher. We do not know what share of a plot was transacted,

much less how many *mu*, or what trees were included in a sale. It was common to sell only parts of a timberland for cutting, or to sell shares of an indeterminate size from a plot. A plaint to the magistrate states for example that from a timberland property in Wendou hamlet, the number of logs cut, numbering about a hundred by thieves, but another batch of three hundred logs was left on the mountain.¹⁸⁶ Crucial information such as this was left outside of the contract text, and worked on the presumption that both parties already had first-hand knowledge of a plot's history and physical condition.

Plaints filed by villagers with the magistrates occasionally allow us to understand the deeper context behind specific timberland properties and get a sense of their importance to elite families, though crucial details like acreage, density, and land prices have to be filled in with information taken from other sources. We know, for example, the land prices and timber planting densities in the Qingshui river basin fluctuated within a certain band. Timber densities were at about 100 logs per *mu*. Timber was typically harvested at ages from 20 to 40 years.¹⁸⁷ Prices for timberlands, based on a handful of Qing dispute resolution contracts (*qingbaizi*) that had the necessary details to make an estimate, were likely to have been in the neighborhood of 1 tael per *mu* in the Qianlong period, 2-3 taels per *mu* in the Jiaqing period, and 2 taels per *mu* in the Tongzhi period.¹⁸⁸ Payments to tenants were most commonly settled well before harvest, at heavily discounted prices in favor of landowners.¹⁸⁹ Within these parameters, we can get a rough sense of what timber returns were like to major landholders. In what follows, we will go over plaints filed on several forest properties and their history, piecing together evidence from

¹⁸⁶ YZF, 1-40.

¹⁸⁷ For the calculations in this subsection, I will assume thirty year harvest cycles.

¹⁸⁸ Lin Qian used a small number of dispute resolution contracts from which we can make an estimate of how much the cost per *mu* of timberlands were like over time. For details, see Lin Qian, "Qingshuijiang liuyu linye jingji zhidu," 61.

¹⁸⁹ See the section on timber cultivators in Chapter 4.

contracts and other sources to get a more complete picture of economic returns were like in the Qing.

Plaints were filed from the late-Qing to early Republic on a property in Wendou because of unauthorized sales of timber made by a local man named Jiang Zhiming from a property named Wuyangxi 污养溪 to a group of outside merchants led by Xiang Laosan. We know from a previous tenancy contract that at least the upper part of the property was reforested in 1848, nearly 60 years ago since the complaint, though it is likely that by the 1900s it had since been reforested with a mix of trees of different maturities. Jiang Zhiming and the outsiders were accused of cutting 500 trees, for which they were paid 400 taels by the rogue merchants. Even over the course of thirty years, this was a handsome return on the investment of the initial landowners, at around 13% annually before deducting payments for tenants, seedlings and other inputs, though most of the shareholders came close to seeing none of this money.¹⁹⁰ Jiang Zhiming himself was a shareholder, owning 3.5 shares out of a total 9 shares, but having cut the timber with Xiang Laosan, claimed that he only 320 logs rather than 500, and prevaricated with different parties when asked about the price, sometimes saying that it was 8 qian and 8 fen per log, or 4 qian per log. He also managed to get the timber as far as the Qingshui river coast before the local *baozhang* intervened.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ This assumes a land cost of 10 taels for a plot of 5 *mu* over a 30 year harvest cycle, before payments to tenants. It is worth underlining that if we assume a tenant share of 40% that was held until harvest, and include this in the cost of inputs, the annual returns will drop to a measly 3%. As we will see in Chapter 4 however, tenants rarely held their shares to harvest, and sold out to their landlords at discounted prices. In practice, actual returns were somewhere between these two extremes, with landlords paying discounted prices for future shares, and earning more than they would have if tenants retained their full rights. To demonstrate to readers the range of returns that I believe were possible in Qingshui river basin timber cultivation depending on one's assumptions about tenancy payments, I have placed these figures in Table 3.

¹⁹¹ YZF 1-65, 1-66, 1-61, 1-59.

Returns could be compressed if owners met with sudden requirements for cash, and there were no eager buyers already knocking on one's door. Though the literature has brought up timber share divisions as an effective institutional solution for long harvest cycles and short-term cash needs in China, the reality of timber share liquidity was more complicated.¹⁹² Harvests needed coordination between shareholders, and shareholders who wished to cash out before harvest needed to find buyers of shares, who were not easy to find even with the help of village brokers.

These difficulties were laid out in a plaint by a Wendou man who had an urgent need to sell his shares because he had run out of food. The man (whose name is unclear from the text) and his household do not appear to have been on the edge of subsistence before the forced sale. He already owned 1.5 out of 3 timberland shares before 1889, and his father bought the remaining 1.5 shares that year, when the timber was harvested. In the following year, they leased out the timberland for replanting. Some years after the forest was replanted, the shares bought by his father were sold, leaving them with 1.5 shares. He had difficulty selling the remainder of the shares when he needed cash. His emotionally charged illustration of these difficulties makes it worth quoting the plaint at length:

“This year...due to the unbearable hardships of famine, I pleaded with my kin to allow me to sell my share of the mountain...to generate income for survival. The price could be adjusted based on the quality of the mountain, as determined by an appraiser. However...[the unnamed man] rejected the offer outright and refused to accept the transaction. Despite making the request three times in succession, it was consistently declined.

¹⁹² Meng Zhang, *Timber and Forestry*, 80-113.

Left without any options, I once again turned to brokers to negotiate with [the individual], suggesting that the mountain be sold to someone else for logging or that it be sold directly to [the individual] for the same purpose. This would at least provide funds to sustain my family, both young and old. Yet again, [the individual] refused, claiming that the mountain's timber was still immature and could not be logged. They suggested it should remain under strict conservation for another ten or more years before being sold.

Such statements are truly unbearable to hear, revealing a complete lack of empathy—indeed, the well-fed cannot comprehend the hunger of others. My family of eight is on the verge of perishing from starvation, their cries of suffering echoing day and night. If we were blessed with sufficient resources, conserving the mountain for another decade, or even several decades, would be acceptable. But alas, we lack even a day's worth of food and suffer in despair.”¹⁹³

The Wendou man was embittered by his inability to turn his shares to cash, and the opposition of his kinsmen to any cutting. It is not clear why he could not just sell the shares to a third party to appease his kinsmen's demands. Perhaps a willing buyer could not be found by the brokers, or one could not be found among his kinsmen, who would not permit these shares to go outside the family.

In any case, the man persisted in trying to sell his shares. Defying his relatives, he found a man named Li to whom he sold over 20 logs for a measly 3 taels, or at most, 0.15 taels a log, roughly half the rate of return for the transaction we saw in the last case, and less once we account for how they already bought out their tenant's timber shares.¹⁹⁴ The logs he sold made it as far as the waterway, but merchant Li was stopped by his kinsmen, who destroyed the logs that

¹⁹³ YZF, 1-52, 1-53.

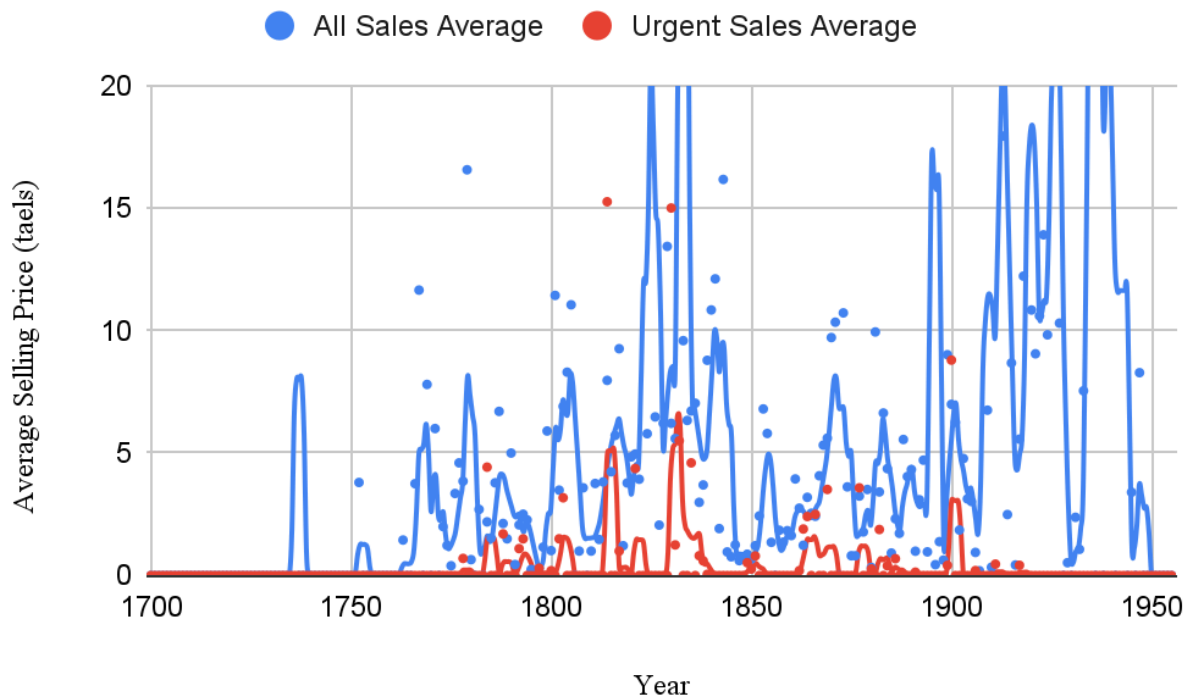
¹⁹⁴ Assuming a land price of 0.4 taels, and a maturity of 30 years for the 3 taels that was received, we get a return of around 7%. With a full payment to tenants, the return is around 2%.

were sold. The Wendou man offered 1000 *wen* as compensation money for his defiance, and made a show of nobility by saying that far too much trouble was caused for a trifling amount.

A separate case from 1911 shows how liquidity problems were serious even for households that held a large stock of assets in timber. In this year, a petitioner to the magistrate borrowed from Jiang Shangzhou a silver ingot worth 50 taels. He successfully made repayments of 40 taels, but could not fill in the remainder plus interest, because “business was trifling, and at the same time hunger was frequent.” By summer he already paid back 45 taels, but was still unable to pay the full amount. He pleaded with his lender Jiang Shangzhou to wait until after the autumn harvest for the rest of the payment. Jiang Shangzhou insisted on settling the matter, and taking six hundred logs of timber—worth more than the original amount owed plus interest—that the petitioner had in his possession until the matter was settled. The petitioner was not a poor man. He had in his hands a considerable amount of mature timber, timberland, and a valuable slice of paddy land to farm rice. Still, he thought the expense of going to court and the damage to their relationship was too high a price to pay. He decided to simply hand over the timber to Jiang Shangzhou.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ YZF 1-66, 1-67.

Figure 5: Urgent Sales



From the contracts in aggregate, we see an indication that these liquidity problems were generally true for the most cash-short share owners. For shares that were sold, in which the seller indicated that the reason for sale was the purchase of food (which I use here as a marker for sellers with the most urgent need for liquidity), average transaction values were much lower than a generic contract that cites a need for cash. It is possible that average values for these contracts were lower because their owners were poorer, and on average owned smaller shares, but this is at best a conjecture. The sale of timber and timber shares—both within the village and to outside merchants—in light of these two cases, and the larger database of contracts, was difficult and tightly policed. Even the land-rich could not settle their obligations or feed themselves at a snap by selling their timber or their shares. Returns were likely imperiled for all but the most patient

of timberland owners, who were willing to wait for good prices to arrive, or could wait until the actual harvest of timber.

Harvest division contracts (*fenyin qiyue*), which represent less problematic circumstances with sales and harvests, suggest higher gross returns. They give away fewer details about the history and context behind the timber plots, but they do outline more cleanly the different obligations that timberland owners had at the moment of harvest. The harvest from segments of the two Wendou hamlet plots Jingdushan 井都山 and Jieligukai 皆里故开 in 1908 breaks down, for example, the list of shareholders, the share division between landowners and tenants, and the fees paid for the harvest.¹⁹⁶ Jingdushan had a sixty-forty split between landowner and tenant for the gross harvest price of 18.88 taels, paid by a local buyer named Jiang Haishun. Deducted from this gross payment were fees for food, timber felling, and labor of 2.38 taels. The remaining 16.54 taels were to be divided between the tenancy and land shares. The landowners were due 9.924 taels. The tenants were due 6.616 taels, divided between multiple holders (it is unclear if these were all tenants, or simply buyers of tenant shares).¹⁹⁷ The harvest of Jingdushan's twin plot on the other hand specifies that 42 logs were cut for 19.6 taels. For this part of the harvest contract, we can attempt a rough estimate of returns. The gross returns of this plot were comparable to the other plots we saw in the legal complaints.¹⁹⁸ Net of the payments made for cutting, food, and labor, 1 log that was given away as payment, plus a 40% share owed to tenants, however, the landowners were due 10.2 taels, giving a lower return of around 3%.

Other plots in the *Byōzoku ringyō* collection of harvest division contracts that break out the specific number of logs sold suggest returns in the same neighborhood. Notably, the purchases

¹⁹⁶ KBZR, E0050.

¹⁹⁷ Assuming a land price of 0.84 taels, and a maturity of 30 years for the 16.54 taels that was received, we get a return of around 10%. With a full payment to tenants, the return is around 3%.

¹⁹⁸ Assuming a land price of 0.84 taels, and a maturity of 30 years for the 19.6 taels that was received, we get a return of around 11%. With a full payment to tenants, the return is around 3%.

from these plots appear to have been made by merchants who were local to Wendou hamlet. The plot Baoge 报格 paid out 53.33 taels to its landowners net of fees and tenancy shares in 1888 for a harvest of 50 logs.¹⁹⁹ Another plot harvested in 1908 paid 8.56 taels gross to the owners, at a rate of 0.428 taels per log for 20 logs. Net of payments for harvesting, but not payments to tenants (no tenants were mentioned in the division document, though it is possible that they were bought out before), the property returned 7.05 taels.²⁰⁰

Table 3: Estimated Returns to Timber Cultivation					
Plot Name	Year	Income	Return without Tenancy Cost	Return with Assumed Tenancy Cost	Source
Wuyangxi 污养溪	Early-1900s	400 taels	13%	3%	YZF 1-65/66/61/59
Unknown	Early-1900s	3 taels	7%	2%	YZF 1-52/53
Jingdushan 井都山	1908	9.924 taels	9%	1%	E0050
Jieligukai 皆里故开	1908	19.6 taels	11%	3%	E0050
Baoge 报格	1888	53.33 taels	14%	2%	E0059
Jiuchaichongfengshuishan 九菜冲风水山	1908	8.56 taels	10%	2%	E0072

¹⁹⁹ Assuming a land price of 1 tael, and a maturity of 30 years, the property generated a return of around 14%. With an assumed tenancy payment of 26.66 taels, the return drops to around 2%. See E0059, KBZR.

²⁰⁰ Assuming a land price of 0.4 taels, and a maturity of 30 years, the property generated a return of around 10%. With an assumed tenancy payment of 3.424 taels, the return drops to around 2%. See E0072, BZR.

Overall, the contracts suggest that timberlands could generate returns that would be hard for households to find comparable alternatives for in this time and place. One has to discount, however, for the difficulty of actually finding locally acceptable buyers of timber or timber shares, disjunctions between timber sales and cash needs, and most importantly, payments to tenants, which could drastically compress returns to landowners if not done early in the cultivation cycle at an advantageous price. The emergence of these contracts in vast quantities beginning in the late-1700s should be seen more as the phenomenon of its use as a savings vehicle, in villages where households of both vast and small wealth had few other places to put their money. The returns, however, were not of a magnitude or velocity that could create the wealthy elites that became regionally important. They were too slow and too costly for all but the most patient and well-funded landholders, who were able to tide over the cash needs of day to day life, and hold shares to harvest.

The Money is in Moving, Not Making: The Timber Merchant's Business

Producing timber was fundamental to the prosperity of the Qingshui river basin. It created a material basis for an industry that increased the commercial utilization of people's labor, and of the land, even if it did not generate large profits for those who put their money behind these enterprises. It was not, however, the principal driver of elite formation in the period we are concerned with, from the late-1700s to the mid-1800s. The profits to be made were too small, and the turnover too slow, for timber production to have built the large, Confucian-educated lineages that held large amounts of property by the eve of the Taiping rebellion.

We are told in oral histories and written vernacular accounts that the wealthy lineages of the Qingshui river basin from this period were built on the success of their members as timber merchants (*shanke*), who brought timber from the stump to the brokerage towns. Unfortunately,

while copious records of timber production exist in the form of tenancy and buy or sale contracts, the same cannot be said for timber trading. Detailed local records of the trade taking timber from producers to the brokerages, whether in the form of account books or general descriptions, have eluded historians so far. The only documents of this nature from the area date from the late-Qing to the Republic.²⁰¹ What we do have on hand is a handwritten account book entitled *Wang Miao za yong* 往苗杂用 (Miscellaneous Expenses on the Journey to the Miao), authored by traveling merchants from Wuyuan county, Anhui province.²⁰² We also have in our hands scattered accounts of merchant traders from the basin from different primary source collections. While we cannot expect all aspects of these records to conform exactly to the business of the Miao timber merchants from upstream, it does give us a sense of the amounts of capital needed to engage in timber trading more generally, as well as the skills, the ecosystem of goods or service providers, and organizations that made the trade possible. What follows is an overview of what we can glean from these documents to cast some light on the problem of elite formation in the Qingshui river basin.

The profits upstream merchants made appears to have come primarily from arbitraging between stumpage prices from producers in the mountains, and the prices in the brokerages. *Wang Miao za yong* records purchases of *tiaomu* (*shanmu* logs, or rounds) in 1818 from Guazhi, one of the three brokerage hamlets. These are some of the only records by actual buyers of timber bought in the brokerages. With the exception of an outlier purchase of very cheap logs,

²⁰¹ Zejiang Long, Zhiyan Tang, and Bingyan Song, *Qingshuijiang Mushang Zhangbu: Guizhou Shaoshu Minzu Diqu Minjian Zhenxi Wenxian Huibian* 清水江木商账簿: 贵州少数民族地区民间珍稀文献汇编 (Guiyang: Guizhou daxue chubanshe, 2019).

²⁰² Zhifan Huang, Zhijun Peng, and Hong Shao, *Qing Zhi Minguo Wuyuan Xian Cunluo Qiyue Wenshu Jilu Shiqi Dazhang Shanxiang Er* 清至民国婺源县村落契约文书辑录 十七 大章山乡 (二) [hereafter QMWX] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2014).

Qingshui river logs were bought at prices ranging from 0.76 taels to 4.20 taels per log at the brokerage.²⁰³

Shanke merchants, based on actual sale citations in *fenyin* contracts, were typically able to buy logs for over 0.4 taels each.²⁰⁴ Other price citations see prices go as high as 1.9 taels for each log, or as low as 0.15 taels per log.²⁰⁵ If we consider late-Qing recovery bounties for lost timber in Tianzhu of about 1.5 taels as a lower bound of possible per log prices, upstream merchants may thus have made a three-fold to four-fold profit for every log that passed through the brokerages, before paying for fees, labor, and other expenses in excess of stumpage. Using the even lower per log citation from *Wang Miao za yong* offers another possibility, but even in this case, merchants made double their money on stumpage prices.²⁰⁶

Shanke with a large base of capital could self-finance their trading activities, but they also made use of loans from the firms running the Miao monopoly brokerages.²⁰⁷ The Qingshui river basin had yet to be enveloped in the system of money centers that spread out in parts of the Qing empire. Physical silver remained the main vehicle of transaction here until the Republic, not paper instruments. A case from the Daoguang period gives us some idea, however, of what resources were available to merchants who wished to, or needed credit to run their trading operations. The household of Jiang Yuying was short of capital to purchase timber in 1839. They successfully borrowed 490 taels from the Zhou family in that year. In the following year, they borrowed another 20 taels. Payments were pursued by the Zhous, but the Jiangs sought a deferral, saying that business was good, and these continued onwards, resulting in the case. The

²⁰³ The exceptional batch here was a purchase of 2 logs for 0.17 taels.

²⁰⁴ See E0072 and E0059 of BZR.

²⁰⁵ Zhou Wenhui, "Diaocha Guizhou," 9.

²⁰⁶ QMWX, 8170-8195.

²⁰⁷ Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucai Zhi Liudong: Qingdai Qingshuijiang Mucai Xiaoyou Diqu de Shichang, Quanli, Yu Shehui* 木材之流动:清代清水江下游地区的市场, 权利, 与社会, (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 173-174.

relationship between the parties here was unclear. Whether the Zhous were creditors on a regional rather than local scale cannot be said for certain, though it is suggested by their apparent residence in a town. But clearly a system of credit, however murky its operations are to us, was in place to grease the path upwards for ambitious merchants, allowing them to buy timber at scale from *shanzhu* to sell in the monopoly brokerages.²⁰⁸ Wendou's Jiang Yuying, if he was indeed able to double his money by arbitraging the price of timber between *shanzhu* and *hanghu*, may have been able to bring in well over a thousand taels in a good year before payments to rafters, middlemen, lenders, and brokers from his five hundred tael loan from the Zhous, far outstripping the velocity and scale of surplus generated from timber cultivation.

Jiang Yuying was in fact representative of the broader group of *shanke* merchants who moved timber in large quantities from the mountains to the brokerages year after year. He was a descendant of the legendary merchant Jiang Shichao, whose story we began the chapter with, and he worked with his kin across branches in this trade. Among his *shanke* kinsmen was Jiang Mingqing 姜名卿, who the same document indicates was sought by the creditors to Jiang Yuying when they tried to urge repayments.²⁰⁹ While their rise was initially built on Jiang Shichao's venture into timber trading, the different branches of the family continued to trade timber, and accumulated land in the village.²¹⁰ In these documents, they were addressed with respect as the heads of different local institutions. Jiang Mingqing was addressed as *zongli* in a tenancy contract, as *jiazhang* in a complaint, and brought in as a middleman in a dispute. This reflected his

²⁰⁸ Document 1-9, 1-10, YZF. For other snippets of the credit market in the basin, see QMWX P8177, which records that 200 taels were borrowed in Wangzhai, one of the three brokerage towns, to pay for wages in 1818. For coverage of the credit market in later times, see Cheng Zeshi, "Cong muhang." On the role of Hongjiang, in Hunan, in the trading and financing of timber, see Wu Shaomei, *Shangzhen Xingshuai*, 28-78.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ YZF 1-86, 1-87. They owned Ranlai. Jiang Mingqing is addressed in this document as *jiazhang*.

position within the lineage, and in the sanying militia alliance that Wendou village was a member of.²¹¹ Lineage members were able to borrow money in large quantities, though it seems that they too had difficulties with repayments and liquidity. A three hundred tael loan co-signed by Jiang Zaiwei, a senior kinsman of Jiang Mingqing, and son of Jiang Shichao, had to be repaid in 1850 with their eighty year-old mother's silver head ornaments (a *shoushi* 首饰, common in Miao cultures) and property.²¹²

A concrete example that likely dates to 1918 however shows that rates of profit several times over the going rate of stumpage of the sort that *shanke* like Jiang Shichao's line enjoyed were real enough, even in a time that was not considered an especially prosperous age for the trade. It records that merchants grossed 71 taels for a transaction selling a mix of timber at the brokerage towns. 131 logs of *zhengmu* sold for about 0.5 taels each, and 65 logs of the smaller *maomu* sold for about 0.06 taels each. Various costs, mainly relating to transportation (to be discussed in more detail in the following chapter), took a cut of 24.12 taels. A line that seems to refer to the cost of stumpage states that the cost 9.52 taels. The two merchants were left with a profit of 38.24 taels.

Table 4: Shanke Sales, Costs And Profits	
Item	Value (taels)
Gross Sales at <i>Sanjiang</i> Villages (4.68 taels of <i>maomu</i> of unspecified number, 67.203 taels of <i>zhengmu</i> numbering 131)	71.88
Cost of Timber on Mountain (Stumpage)	(9.52)
Cost of Transportation	(24.12)
Profit	38.24

²¹¹ See YZF, 4-14 and 4-15.

²¹² YZF, 1-8, 1-9.

To a great extent, the success of indigenous *shanke* traders in operations such as these was built on the same fundamental conditions that traders anywhere needed: The ability to not just move goods from one place to another, but also the ability to make use of their geographical knowledge, personal networks, language skills, and bonds of trust with regional counterparts, a bundle of advantages that were difficult to conquer for Han merchants.²¹³ In the Qingshui river basin, however, the opportunity to arbitrage between stumpage and brokerage prices was further buoyed by the conscious political arrangement of state actors. Alongside the establishment of the Miao brokerages in the Yongzheng reign, the Qing state expressly prohibited downstream Han merchants from getting involved in trading past the Miao border, a practice that was termed “trespassing the river” (*yuejiang* 越江). Similarly, using indigenous surrogates as buyers of stumpage was prohibited. The reasoning behind this custom, just like for the brokerages, was to protect Miao traders from competition. Addressing the rise of surrogate purchasing by Han merchants in the late Qing, the Liping prefect argued that “the capital of the *shanke* is limited.” “Who is able to raise their [bidding] price and compete with [the *shuike*] in buying [stumpage]?” Protecting the Miao traders also came from a stance of self-interest for the prefect, for whom the surrogate buying had the effect on concealing trade from taxation (*manke*), showing how a mutualist relationship existed between the protected indigenous traders and the prefectural government.²¹⁴ It is impossible to quantify just how large of an impact the measures to prevent the entry of outside capital and traders into the Qingshui river basin had on the gap between stumpage and brokerage price, but suffice to say, some portion of *shanke* profits must be chalked up to the specific arrangement of market institutions from the Yongzheng reign until the Republic—an arrangement that was bitterly defended through litigation in the prefectural *yamen*.

²¹³ JPXZ, 1318-1320.

²¹⁴ *Jin hanghu dai ke ru shan gou mu gaoshi* 禁行户代客入山购木告示, Stele Collection of the Jinping County Archives.

Jiang Mingqing partook in a major petition in 1887, representing the interest of shanke merchants in the Qingshui river basin before the magistrate. In this petition, Jiang Mingqing once again deployed their identity as “indigenous” (*shiju* 世居) to the area and tropes about the gullibility of the Miao to make claims upon the Qing state, this time against the *hanghu* of the brokerage towns:

“We Jiang Xingguo, Jiang Mingqing, Longdati, Jiang Xingwei and others are furnishing a petition to the administrations we are subordinated to...At the start, when the dynasty established these institutions, they expected that each would act as they should. Why would there be any need for change? Taking profits from each other cannot be said to be treachery, or the pursuit of profit that extinguished regulation. [In this], there are none like Guazhi, Wangzhai, or Maoping of Liping prefecture. The merchants and others indigenous [*shiju* 世居] to Liping and Tianzhu, because their mountains are many and paddies are few, plant shanmu to make a living. When their ancestors cut trees, they took them to the riverbanks for sale...

[Among the] mountain merchants upstream, the ignorant and simple reside in great numbers [*shanghe shanfan yu pu ju duo* 上河山贩愚朴居多]. In contrast, downriver merchants were clever and wealthy. The *sanjiang* merchants curried favor with the downstream merchants while abusing the *shanfan* merchants, treating the downstreamers as if they were their parents, and viewing the *shanfan* as no better than a stick in the ground...”²¹⁵

Their core grievance against the Miao *hanghu* was the over-exploitation of their dominance as brokers, and the degeneration of customary practices at the expense of the *shanke*. They

²¹⁵ JPXZ, 1335-1337.

accused the *hanghu* of manipulating fees, levies, and exchange rates used at the brokerage; continued collection of jiangyin fees—originally meant to insure *shanke* against unexpected thefts and losses—without making payouts; and passing the cost of labor for security onto the *shanke*. Perhaps the most serious of the threats to the *shanke*, in economic terms, was that the *hanghu* were said to have started taking capital from downstream merchants, and used this to make purchases from timberland owners themselves, instead of relying on the *shanke* as intermediaries, defeating the purpose of the closed markets of the Qingshui river basin. In their telling of the history of the institution, the brokerages maintained practices acceptable to the *shanke* until the Daoguang reign, but these broke down beginning in the Xianfeng reign. “Only from Xianfeng until now, when the locality was roughly at peace, did they seize the moment to seek profits, and a hundred abuses grew in profusion [*wei zi Xianfeng zhi jin, difang cu jing, cheng shi she li, bai bi congsheng* 惟自咸丰至今，地方粗静，乘时射利，百弊丛生].”²¹⁶

From this petition, we see that Jiang Mingqing of Wendou was no ordinary *shanke*. He held a leading, representative role together with a small handful of other merchants. Neither was he an ordinary villager. As we will see later in Chapter 6, Jiang Mingqing also headed the *zhongying* militia that brought villages together in an alliance when rebellions broke out mid-century. He had political capital to burn with the magistrates. He helped articulate a narrative of indigenous identity to make claims for a group of merchants that would otherwise be dispersed, reiterating how the Qing also had to address not just the *hanghu*, but also the *shanke* as a constituency within the broader set of indigenous peoples in the area.

²¹⁶ JPXZ, 1335.

Table 5: Price Per Log Citations In The Sanjiang Timber Brokerages			
Total Price Paid	Number of Logs	Price Per Log	Reference Page
15.5 tael	9	1.6	8170
0.17 tael	2	0.085	8170
95.2 tael	112	0.85	8170
1.7 tael	2	0.85	8170
281 tael	61	4.20	8173
141.96 tael	182	0.76	8173
122.8 tael	89	1.38	8173
Source: QMWX, and checked in reference to Cheng Zeshi, “Qingdai Zhongye.”			

Moving goods upstream was another means for Qingshui river merchants to make money outside of timber cultivation and trading. Sources rarely relay to us just how lively Qingshui river markets for commercial goods were, or whether the local economy was mostly autarkic, with timber sent downstream, but very little sent upstream, as households produced their own cloth, tools, and other goods. The autarkic view supports the idea that the silver flowing upstream in exchange for timber was used to purchase the only assets available like timberland, or else hoarded in the form of burial treasures and silver ornaments associated by contemporary scholars with the Miao and the Dong.²¹⁷ It appears unlikely however that the Miao and the Dong maintained self-sufficient economies that bought very little and supported no markets. The *Wang*

²¹⁷ Zhang, “Mucai zhi liudong,” 179-180.

Miao za yong accounts show us that a wide variety of consumer goods were available for purchase in the border towns of Guazhi and Tuokou, or sometimes from further out, in Hongjiang on the Yuan river in Hunan. The same goods were available in timber producing hamlets just a short trip upriver past the border, whether through immigrant market streets, peddlers, kinsmen, or anybody who was part of the circuit of goods and people between the brokerage towns and producer hamlets.²¹⁸

Some of the goods sold in markets made great sense given the Qingshui river's role in the timber trade. Ropes, used for raft tying, made a frequent appearance on the purchase lists, along with metal goods like nails and bars. But so were goods for everyday use, including everything from noodle bowls, soup bowls, knives, thatched bamboo for roofs, caskets for grain and oil, salt, mats, matted doors, *doufugan* (pressed tofu), iron, and charcoal pencils. Timber rafters faced long journeys and the availability of such goods on the market, just as it would for any port town, made it possible for them to live on simple huts atop their rafts. The same holds true for the sailors on *mayangchuan* who visited the port towns, as well as mobile laborers of all sorts who moved along the river.²¹⁹ Merchants brought in other consumer goods for sale to villages as well. Cloth was brought in from Hongjiang, Hunan, even in modest quantities, on boats. And general goods stores, many run by Hunanese migrants, carried a variety of textile products, salt, and tobacco.²²⁰

²¹⁸ See for example Qingqing Zhu, "Jiangxi Jie: Qingshuijiang Xiayou Yi Ge Yimin Cunluo de Xingcheng '江西街':清水江下游一个移民村落的形成," *Yuanshengtai Minzu Wenhua Xuekan* 3, no. 2 (2011): 33–38.

²¹⁹ QMWX, 8184.

²²⁰ "Ti wei huishen Guizhou Liping fu min Wu Laofu deng huo qie Wang Zihu dian nei yin wu yu guan yi an yi lu fenbie ding ni qing zhi shi 题为会审贵州黎平府民吴老幅等伙窃汪自湖店内银物逾贯一案依律分别定拟请旨事," 1795, 02-01-007-024897-0007, FHA; "Wei Guizhou Li Ping fu ke min Lu Hesheng deng bei zei qiang qu chuan nei huo wu yi an xian man zang zei wei huo kai jie shu fang wu zhi ming ti can shi 为贵州黎平府客民陆合盛等被贼抢去船内货物一案限满赃贼未获开揭疏防武职名题参事," 1842, 02-01-02-3022-002, FHA.

Thus a wide variety of commercial goods were certainly available for buyers who were linked to the timber trade circuits, including the indigenous merchants from upstream. While the quantities of such goods that actually made it to the hamlets are unknown, as are the merchants who organized and financed their movement, it is not implausible that indigenous merchants were also engaged in the trade of goods other than timber.

Table 6: Prices of Goods in the Sanjiang Markets			
Item	Price	Number	Reference
Rice	1.29 taels	6 dou 2 sheng	8183
Doufugan	120 wen	80 pieces	8183
Firewood	0.45	120 dan	8183
Iron	100 wen	Unknown	8184
Plowing <i>gang</i>	151 wen	4 pieces	8188
Nails	159 wen	182 pieces	8189
Palm cloth (<i>zongyi</i>)	60 wen	1 jian	8189
Tea Basin (<i>chapan</i>)	97 wen	1 piece	8189
Charcoal Pencil? (tanbi?)*	146 wen	4 pieces	8189
Matted door	0.24 taels?	1 piece	8190
Wooden Cabinet	-	3 dui	8193
Source: QMWX			

*The handwriting is unclear. Cheng Zeshi reads the listing as a tanlou 炭篓 (a charcoal basket?). See Cheng, “Qingdai zhongye.”

These conditions created a sizable class of indigenous *shanke* who moved timber and other goods between the mountains and the brokerage towns. Shan Honggen reckons based on the different number of “brands” that were stamped upon logs using axes that there were more than two thousand households that belonged to this group in the peak Qianlong-Jiaqing period, though by 1919, the number of axe marking shops had gone down to just three hundred.²²¹ These *shanke* were rooted in a village within the basin itself, and formed a distinct interest group from the *hanghu* brokers in the border towns, and the *shuike* merchants from downstream. In contrast to these two groups, their profits were cycled back into the basin through purchases of land. These solidified their dominance over villages, and empowered them to patronize local institutions for education and policing.

In sum, the Qingshui river basin had considerable differences between stumpage and brokerage prices, a working credit system, a state-sheltered market, and likely an emergent milieu of consumers to whom miscellaneous wares could be sold. One can imagine how indigenous villagers could generate a large stock of wealth over a lifetime as traders in this environment and catapult themselves into the class of Qing local elites with some access to channels for education and official posts, as the oral histories suggest. A well-connected individual, who perhaps knew of a large forest owner in some distress, and who held the trust of someone in the sanjiang brokerages, could keep for themselves the gap between stumpage and brokerage price for thousands of logs. With capital in his hands, he can repeat the same process year after year, taking advantage of unusual pricing opportunities as they arose, and occasionally taking back metal tools and porcelain wares he found in the towns. The great merchants like Yao

²²¹ See, Shan Honggen, *Jinping Wenshu*, 41-56; Zhang Yingqiang, *Mucui zhi liudong*.

Jizhou, Jiang Zhiyuan, and Jiang Shichao, whose names were sung in the basin, and whose memories are still passed down, must have gone down a similar path.

However, there may be a dark side to *shanke* dominance over village society that the present literature rarely touches upon. Given their near hegemony over the production of sources, we do not see what *shanke* relations were like with the poorer classes of the Qingshui river basin—those with little to no land in their names, migrants who made the long trek from Hunan to Guizhou, and even the landed classes who were under their thumb. Plaint writers may be incentivized to exaggerate their accounts, but at least one accuser suggests the possibility that Jiang Mingqing and the *shanke* could be oppressive within village society. Liu Yongqing accused them of lording over the Qingshui river, coercing timberland owners to sell timber to them:

“Suddenly, there were the Wendou ‘tiger hegemons’ [*huba* 虎霸] Jiang Yuying and Jiang Mingqing...who dared seize the chaos to proclaim themselves kings [*cheng luan cheng wang* 乘乱称王]. They dominate the Qingshui river region, slaughtering freely on their lands. Of the merchants and subjects near and far, there are none who have not heard their reputation and are stricken with terror...

Along the river, [they have] recklessly cut the timber clean. Of all the families who have mountains, none have failed to encounter their poison. [If anyone dared to even say to the evil ones that a price had to be paid for the timber], they will not only push you out and slaughter you. More than this they will drop you into the water alive...”²²²

Yet another way in which the sources we have on hand might conceal how the *shanke* used coercive or exploitative techniques to gain an upper hand over sellers of timber at the stump was

²²² YZF 1-12, 1-13.

through the use of debased currency. The possibility of *shanke* using debased silver to purchase from sellers was brought up in at least one contract that I am aware of, dating from 1838:

“The matter is that, having purchased from Jiang Kaiming’s one plot of timber from the location called Conggulong with over one hundred logs for cutting to do business, it was agreed that the price will be fifty-four taels and five *qian* of silver. In this locale, the silver quality is exceedingly poor. Trade is inconvenient. Benefitting from Kaiming’s gracious kindness, he willingly agreed to Shineng releasing the timber down to the Wangzhai timber market for sale, whereupon [Shineng] shall select and examine the clean silver from downstream, and return to settle the exchange. For this timber price, each tael shall bear an interest rate of two *fen* of silver per month, at Shineng’s willing consent.”²²³

This contract does not tell us directly about the problem of *shanke* using debased silver to obtain extraordinary profits from owners of timber. But it does give us a solution to what the seller thought were general problems in the region: That the silver in circulation was poor, that they were likely to get a poor deal if they just accepted the *shanke*’s offer as is, and therefore they were willing to accept delayed payment so the *shanke* could obtain good quality silver from the border markets. This contract is a source that might be thought of as exceptional. It goes against the weight of the immense quantity of contracts, which, on their face, signal a well-functioning market. However, one can imagine, in the silence of many contracts executed without issue, the many *shanzhu* who just accepted what was offered to them out of convenience, and *shanke* who had plenty of capital to work with, who could insist on their terms, for they did not need petty credit, or the unusual circumstances of the timberland owners, who were willing

²²³ “Jiang Shineng gou mu qiankuan ju 姜士能购木欠款据,” JCSY 4, 376. The price per log that this comes out to is about 0.545 taels.

to delay payment as they were settling internal disputes over ownership. *Shanke* are conventionally thought of as the victims of silver adulteration in the Qingshui river literature. It would be ironic if they had in fact benefitted from *shanzhu* accepting the reality of adulterated silver in the basin, while receiving higher quality silver at the border markets.

Overall, the risk with our source base is that we do not see what timberland owners thought of the *shanke*, as they did not coalesce into an interest group in the same way the *shanke* did. The *shanke* themselves had an incentive to find ways to obtain timber as cheaply as possible if their game, as we have seen, was to borrow money and arbitrage between the mountains and the border towns. Still, it seems questionable that such wanton and thorough exploitation of timber owners by *shanke* elites across a large swath of the Qingshui river basin was sustainable beyond the short-term. People would have stopped planting trees or owning timberlands. Likewise, they would have stopped producing forestry contracts. To understand the motives behind these complaints, it is crucial to consider the context of its time: The slow decline in the timber trade in the Daoguang period, and the Xian-Tong rebellions. As order crumbled, *shanke* elites filled the vacuum. Jiang Mingqing played a leading role in the militias that attempted to preserve the status quo. Funds were raised from the holdings of the *shanke* elites, but also from the other sources in the region, including, potentially, timberland owners. The Liu Yongqing complaint in particular may be a reflection of the tensions of that time, specifically a reaction to the powers that *shanke* elites, in their role as militia leaders, may have arrogated to themselves in the name of order. This context will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

The sources deployed in this study are flawed and limited in scope, but they do represent one of the few quantitative impressions of timber cultivation and private timber trading in the empire

outside of state-produced sources. Even in its peak during the first decades of the nineteenth century, regenerative timber cultivation for export to distant markets was likely a difficult, and at best modestly profitable endeavor, if one did hold forest properties over generations. Trading in the state-protected markets for stumpage across the Miao border, on the other hand, created opportunities for price arbitrage at scale. These conditions were directly related to the rapid rise of new indigenous village elites in the Qingshui river basin, opening a path to social mobility that required no land, little time, and little capital to build large stocks of wealth that would take generations to whittle down. This crust of timber traders and forestland owners represented a new class of commercially-oriented elites in the region, who consumed their profits on lavish structures, property and education. Their rise will have important repercussions for regional stability and governance.

In slow-growing organic economies, where surpluses were generated in large part from the products of the land, the formation of new elites happened most rapidly through the exploitation of existing natural stocks, or by tapping into aggregated surpluses through the flows of goods and people. The portals to great quantities of wealth were widest in activities like the exploitation of mineral stocks, or handling the flows through trade and taxation. However, these portals were also the most vulnerable to predation from state, and sometimes local power, with their concentration in towns and along geographic features like rivers.²²⁴ Elite formation in the organic economy is thus also a story of political contestation, as it was in the Qingshui river basin, where *shanke* were able to tap into the downstream flow of timber thanks in part to the arrangements that came into place after the campaign to regularize rule under the Yongzheng emperor. *Shanke* were also able to tap into these flows through their capable articulation of claims as indigenous

²²⁴ The idea of material, technical, and spatial vulnerability to political claims is partly inspired by Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, (London: Verso, 2011).

peoples upon the state, while adopting Chinese landholding practices and symbols to consolidate their position in village society. Jiang Mingqing and Jiang Shichao's lineages traded timber and accumulated land, but they also claimed Han ancestry through their genealogies, competed for imperial degrees, and sought legitimation through awards. It is in this way, through a combination of a privileged position in the timber trade, and legitimacy in the eyes of magistrates, that new, regionally important elites emerged from indigenous villages in the span of a mere century, driving traditional native chieftain intermediaries into near irrelevance.

The process of elite formation inevitably created winners and losers. As open tracts of forest land that were used for rotating slash-and-burn cultivation gave way to private agroforestry, and indigenous merchants with large amounts of silver accumulated the rights to the products of the land, villagers had to find new patterns of earning for themselves not only subsistence, but also cash. And as the timber trade grew in size, new occupations emerged that offered the possibility of life with access to little or no land. It is to these new occupations that we turn to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: CATCHING THE SILVER THAT TRICKLES UPSTREAM: TENANTS, LUMBER PULLERS, RAFTERS, IMMIGRANTS, AND THE RISE OF WAGE LABOR IN THE QINGSHUI RIVER BASIN

Introduction

The previous chapter showed how village elites in the Qingshui river basin were able to accumulate capital through timber trading activities from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. This wealth was used to consume a wide variety of goods, but was also deployed to secure the status of their descendants through education, buildings, and land. The process of social differentiation, however, was inevitably a double-edged sword. Alongside rising elites who accumulated land emerged new groups who did not have sufficient access to land—if they were left with any land at all—and sought new strategies to piece together a means of subsistence. Among these were seasonal laborers from indigenous villages in the timber industry, and full-time craftsmen—stone workers, petty shopkeepers, metalworkers, and so on—who were often immigrants from Hunan. These wage earners formed a mobile, and occasionally organized underclass in the Qingshui river basin over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The emergence of wage work as an economic safety net, a subject of political conflict, and an engine of commercial consumption in the region will be the subject of the chapter.

The literature in global economic history has associated the process of concentrating land holdings and elite formation with proletarianization. Those who lost access to village lands as they were enclosed, or otherwise came from outside the village and had no means to purchase or claim land, were compelled to earn their subsistence by selling their labor as tenants, timber pullers, and rafters.²²⁵ The answers suggested to us by the sources are more nuanced. While there

²²⁵ For an account on the so-called “semi-proletarianization” of the agrarian economy in China (as compared to Europe), see Philip Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Charles Tilly, “Proletarianization: Theory and Research,” (University of Michigan, Center for Research on Social Organization Working Paper No. 202, August 1979).

was some portion of the working population in southeastern Guizhou that became detached from the land and relied solely on wages for subsistence, the seasonality of the wage-paying occupations, and the scale of these wage labor opportunities relative to the overall population suggest to us that it was far more likely that households more often encountered wage labor as a cash supplement to their primary economic activities, or as a mix of seasonal opportunities that were bridged together to make a living.

Furthermore, to labor for wages was not simply to put oneself at the mercy of the market. Wage labor in southeastern Guizhou was also a product of the recognition by village elites, officials, and traders of an implicit “right” to subsistence, and the power derived from local dominance of waterways and ports. What I will argue for in this chapter is that there was also a moral economy component to the timber economy of southeastern Guizhou. Supporting subsistence for the poor through wage work was an idea that had currency among workers, village elites, and Qing officials, and they sought to preserve an upward trickle of silver to rafters, pullers, planters, and craftsmen from the yearly downstream movements of timber to Hunan. Supporting the common good by way of support for public works and the regulation of markets at the village level, as we will see briefly in the conclusion, also gained traction among the moneyed classes. To the extent that elite formation in the Qingshui river basin was a destabilizing phenomenon, wage work and countervailing redistributive impulses served as splints that helped Qingshui river villages set into new forms.

Just how much the typical household relied on income from wage labor for their budgets in the area is impossible to figure with any precision. However, evidence from contracts, steles, records of various disputes, legal cases, and ethnographic studies from the Republic do give us a sense of which occupations were important to regional society, and how much they could matter

for the budgets of individual households. Timber rafting was perhaps the largest and most important of the wage paying occupations. It paid better than most other wage-paying occupations, and was a viable occupation for men with absolutely no access to land, when combined with other work. The same can be said for craft occupations, which supported a growing number of independent migrants to the region. Other forms of wage work—forest plantation tenancies, timber pulling, and timber recovery—paid less, and the work was similarly intermittent. In the case of tenancies, such work could provide a means of subsistence for a few years, and a very meager cash income. For the rest of the population that still had a toe-hold on the land, these opportunities offered valuable cash supplements to their primary economic activities.

Overall, this chapter shows the impact of wage work, cash incomes and commercialization stemming from the trans-regional Yangzi river trade on this corner of the Qing empire for a spectrum of non-elite households whose economic fortunes became increasingly tied to the fortunes of the empire at large. It attempts to give us a concrete sense of how this phenomenon affected their ability to subsist and participate in the empire's broader material culture, expressed through their purchases of goods in the market. It also gives us an illustration of how local and regional institutions protected, to some extent, this segment of society from the market. To live as a rafter, timber puller, or migrant worker in the Qingshui river basin over this time still meant facing different combinations of material poverty, social exclusion, and insecurity. Nevertheless, the availability of wage work, by force of political conflict and cooperation, helped sustain new patterns of economic life and new standards of material welfare within the broad segments of the indigenous populations in the Qingshui river basin that persisted well into the twentieth century.

The Wage-Paying Occupations: An Overview

The exchange of money for work most certainly predated the records of such exchanges in documents from southeastern Guizhou, but before the enclosure of timberlands and the concentration of claims to productive assets like land in the hands of elites, wage labor was probably a non-compulsive phenomenon that villagers participated in opportunistically. Indeed, the latter characterization, of opportunistic participation for cash income, continued to be applicable to many subsets of participation in timber-related, wage-paying work.

By the time we begin to recover greater volumes of documentary evidence on wage labor in the late eighteenth century, we also see clear occupational typologies appear, for which the terminology may have been borrowed from other areas in China that also had large timber-export industries. The three main classifications for timber industry wage workers were as follows: forest plantation workers (*zaishou*), land transportation workers (*hanfu*), and water transportation (*shuifu*). These three varied in their size relative to the overall labor market and volume of documentation. In this section, I will be providing a brief overview of the different wage work opportunities that arose with the rise of the timber export industry, which will serve as the background for the later case studies.

Land Transportation

The wage-paying occupation which saw the largest breadth of participation was overland transportation of timber. These workers were referred to in vernacular terminology as “dry workers” (*hanfu* 旱夫), whose work was mainly to move trees from their stump to the nearest waterway, but also included associated tasks like logging and timber dressing.

The transportation of timber from stump to waterway was the most costly on a per unit distance basis. This cost reflects the large amounts of labor that were deployed to move timber

over short distances. *Hanfu* labor teams could thus be quite large. Later ethnographies observed that the number of laborers needed for land transportation typically exceeded what the local hamlet or even a somewhat bigger catchment of several hamlets could supply. Labor teams easily surpassed a hundred, and even reached a thousand in exceptional cases.²²⁶ The seasonality of labor demand, concentrated in the lead up to flood season from winter to spring when the water volumes carrying timber downriver swell by 80% of the annual figure, and when the agricultural busy season began (starting in the third lunar month), only intensified the supply-demand imbalances for dry land workers.²²⁷

Land transportation labor organization was more hierarchical and rigid compared to plantation and water transportation work. Headmen called *pengtou* (棚頭) or *baotou* (包頭), negotiated terms by contract collectively with upstream merchants (*shanke*, like the merchants from the previous chapter) or simple landowners. Large extralocal teams (a characteristic implied in named used for the labor brokers *pengtou*, referring *pengmin*, literally “shack people” who set up temporary homes in the mountains) numbering in the hundreds could be diverted from work elsewhere by such brokers to fill in for a dryland transport job, supplementing whatever local labor that could be mustered. Thus a village survey suggested that almost all able bodied men—even those who belonged to households which owned a lot of property—participated in dryland transportation labor in the past. The sole exceptions were craftsmen and those who were physically unable to engage in dryland transportation work.²²⁸

At its crudest, dryland transportation was unskilled work that relied primarily on the massing of raw muscle power, occasionally assisted by tools and contraptions to move timber. Small logs in small batches might simply be carried over the shoulder by 1-2 people, or even by

²²⁶ DSLD, 60-62.

²²⁷ Xu, “Qingshuijiang shisheng miao,” JPXZ, 1561-1568; *Guizhou jingji shouce*, 9-15.

²²⁸ Zhang, *Mucui zhi liudong* 173-181; DSLD, 104-121.

children. Larger logs would need a team of 4-8 people and the aid of specialized tools like a pulling beam (*taigang*), which was attached to the log by a rope and pulling nails. This sort of manual lumber pulling was more common on flatter terrain, and when the total quantity of lumber to be transported was small.²²⁹

However, where the terrain was favorable, dryland timber transportation can take a more capital- and skill-intensive form. “Flying frames,” used to transport lumber from one elevated point to another (much like a viaduct between two mountains), is one example of an expensive contraption that might be used for overland transportation, requiring hundred of thousands of logs to serve just as material for the framework, plus the beddings and guiding rails.²³⁰ Simpler wooden slipways (called *xianglu/jiaxiang/xiangdao*) of a similar basic structure were used for gentler slopes, or for level areas that were too rocky or too difficult to pull timber through.²³¹ The wages for dryland transportation were generally quite low. One citation claims that daily wages were able to buy 8-10 jin of unhusked rice (*gu*), which might be valued at around 0.04-0.05 taels per day, wages that place them on the same level of compensation as unskilled laborers.²³²

Not all overland timber transportation used expensive contraptions like flying frames. Forests adjacent to waterways can use labor and capital efficient of methods like slipways dug out of the ground, called *hongdao* (洪道/洪路), or “floodways.” These floodways were one to two meter wide slipways built on moderate slopes, typically no more than thirty degrees, with bottom surfaces made out of stamped earth, bamboo, or other materials like stone and sand.²³³

Floodways connected forests to the nearest stream or river, with lumber sent hurtling down at

²²⁹ See the section on transportation in JPLZ, 245-253.

²³⁰ DSLD, 101-103.

²³¹ Ibid, 101-103; Zhang Yingjie, “Linying Miaozaizhai”; JPLZ, 245.

²³² DSLD 60; Lee, “The Political Economy.” Prices are based on Qing levels, which were at 1.48 taels per *shi* of husked rice. These price levels are supported by other observation points in local gazetteers. One *shi* of husked rice (*mi*) is equal to two *shi* of unhusked rice (*gu*).

²³³ JPLZ, 245-247.

high speeds. The upfront cost in terms of labor was considerable. The immediate area first had to be cleared of vegetation, rocks and other irregularities on the surface before a channel was dug out, and loose earth stamped down. Once a floodway was built however, further work was unnecessary, and indeed many floodways remain usable to the present day in southeastern Guizhou villages. The upfront costs of construction can be stretched out over many decades of expected use.²³⁴

The relative efficiency of floodway timber transportation was attractive to forest landowners despite the risks with which it came. For this reason, easement rights (rights of passage over someone else's land) were not especially arduous to obtain, even while they were protected by custom, and brought short-term harms to the owner's property by reducing available area for planting or damaging standing crops. This is evidenced by dispute resolution contracts related to easements and floodways. All of the dispute resolution contracts I found related to easements and floodways were resolved without injury to both the parties trying to pass, or the landlords whose properties were being trespassed. See this case of two timber merchants who pass used the property of Jiang Kaitai from Wendou hamlet without permission:

“The persons establishing this fault contract are Yanwan stockade's Tai Laobao and Fan Jingying. Because [we] grow lumber to make a living, [we] erroneously passed [through] the mountain property of Jiang Kaitai, named Baniushan. From ancient times, [this property] had never opened up a *honglu* to set off lumbers [for transportation], [but] unexpectedly, in the eleventh year of the Daoguang reign [1831], we and some others [likely referring to their laborers] hauled lumber erroneously across Jiang Kaitai's mountain. By way of the middlemen's pacification [of this dispute], we take

²³⁴ Wu Shengjun and Ye Jingqing, “Mucai yu yunshu: Qingshuijiang rengong yinglin zhi ‘hongdao.’ yi Jinping xian Wendou Miao zhai de kaocha wei zhongxin,” *Guizhou daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 35.5 (2017): 18-23.

responsibility for everyone through the Tai and Fan name. Should anyone require documentation, [we] establish this fault contract as evidence.”²³⁵

This contract references a basic custom in the timber growing areas around Jinping county in Guizhou: “New [*honglu*] are not to be opened up, old [*honglu*] are not to be removed (*xin lu bu kai, jiu lu bu mie* 新路不开, 旧路不灭).” Though it is not directly mentioned in this contract, by stating that the property never used to have a *honglu*, the implication is that it now has one because Tai Laobao and Fan Jingying built one together with their accomplices.²³⁶ The Baniushan plot is located at a rather high altitude plot (500-600 meters over sea level), and located close to the mountain summit. This signals that it was probably a forest property that was developed rather later in the 1830s, and did not have waterway access until Tai and Fan had built one to connect to their own property further out.²³⁷

In the dispute resolution contract, no substantive compensation was required of the offending party, with Tai and Fan getting away with nothing more than a light slap on the wrist: a short note of acknowledgement that they had violated social custom. Overall, no-compensation resolution was one of the two most common resolutions to *honglu* disputes, with some resolutions simply adding that the offending parties are to be more careful in passing by, or that they are to compensate any damaged trees the next time.

These amicable resolutions to floodway construction reflect the benefit that landlords obtained from newly established access to waterways. A study of these flood channels claims that they can transport 0.15 cubic meters of lumber per run up to 223 times a day, coming up to a total of 33.5 cubic meters per day. Adjusted for the number of workers employed, flood channels were seven times more efficient than simple timber pulling, with each man transporting over

²³⁵ Taken from Wu and Ye, “Mucai yu yunshu,” 23.

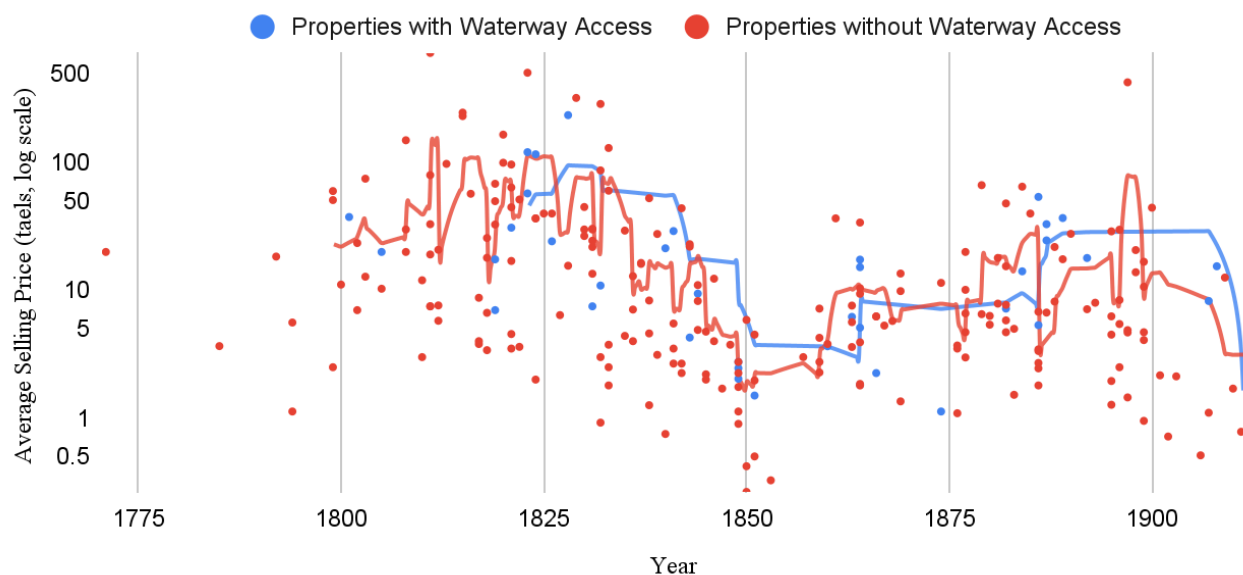
²³⁶ Wu, “Qingshuijiang liuyu rengonglin jiufen.”

²³⁷ Ibid.

eight cubic meters per day.²³⁸ This increased efficiency not only improved the salability of stands close to floodways. It also resulted in a modest premium for the underlying land, with land indicated to have a floodway on its border generally selling at higher prices than generic timberland.²³⁹

Efficient flood channels are mainly found in areas close to waterways, and can serve as rough geographical markers for the dominant mode of dryland lumber transportation. A highly productive littoral hamlet like Wendou hamlet had 27 flood channels, and its neighbor Jiachi had 12 flood channels.²⁴⁰ Landlocked hamlets like Kuidan on the other hand were completely reliant on dryland transportation methods, and its poorer residents were more reliant on the dryland transportation trade for their subsistence.²⁴¹

Figure 6: Shanmu Crop Prices for Properties with and without Waterway Access



²³⁸ JPLZ, 246.

²³⁹ The six-contract running averages of *shanmu* crops for properties with versus without waterway access as indicated by its boundaries (*sizhi*) in BZR contracts show a consistent premium that is only interrupted by the occasional high-value sale of a property without waterway access.

²⁴⁰ Wu and Ye, “Mucai yu yunshu.”

²⁴¹ DSLD, 101-103.

Water Transportation

Timber that made it to the shoreline was passed on to rafters, called “water workers” (*shuifu* 水夫). Unlike dryland transportation, which can draw on a wider geographical pool of mobile laborers pulled together by labor brokers, waterborne transportation of timber was a localized, monopolistic affair. Villages obtained all the timber transportation work in a certain segment of the river, before passing on the timber to rafters from the next village that holds similar privileges downstream. This formed a relay system that stretched out to the brokerages in Wangzhai and beyond. Han timber merchants from downstream were specifically prevented from bringing their own rafters upstream to transport the timber that they had purchased. This was a prerogative reserved to locals.

As we have seen in Chapter 2 with the case of Gao’e and Gaoliu hamlets, a segmented system of waterborne timber transportation dated back at least to the dredging of the Qingshui river from the late-Yongzheng to the early-Qianlong reign. These local transportation monopolies were jealously guarded by their holders, and accordingly, left historians with better documentation, unlike for the more mobile and geographically dispersed dryland transportation industry. Steles were set up in many villages that held these monopolies, asserting the permanence of their rights, and cited rafting as an occupation that the poor had taken up to preserve their livelihoods.²⁴²

²⁴² See the Peiliang stele in Chapter 2.

Table 7: Price Citations for Rafting Transportation	
Route	Price Citation per fascicle (<i>guazi</i>)
Guazhi-Maoping	100 wen
Maoping-Wangzhai	50 wen
Guazhi-Tianzhu/Xingong	130 wen
Wangzhai-Tianzhu/Xingong	50 wen
YZF 275. A “fascicle,” or simply a “bundle” refers to a unit of account for small raft called <i>guazi</i> 挂子, usually composed of 5-8 logs each. Wu Zhonglun, <i>Shanmu</i> , 1-19.	

Rafting work was considered a natural local monopoly because of the specific demands on the skill of the rafters. Rafters had to be familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the local waterways—generally fast, and hiding dangerous shoals and rocks under the stream until one reaches Dongting lake. Deaths were considered common incidents, and grounded logs occurred frequently enough that multiple villages along the trading routes have steles for the redemption of lost timber. Relative to dryland timber transportation, this was a high risk and high stakes occupation.²⁴³

However, rafters were generally better compensated relative to dryland and agricultural wage workers.²⁴⁴ In 1777, the cost of transportation from the most productive forestlands of the basin close to Yaoguang hamlet to the monopoly ports was around 4-5 taels for a raft of 100 logs. This covered a distance of around 60 kilometers.²⁴⁵ The standard was to have two rafters per log,

²⁴³ Zhang, *Mucui*; Wu Shaomei and Lu Yongfeng, “Ming zhi Minguo shiqi yuanshui shangyou Miaomu jisan yu shizhen geju zhi bianqian,” *Guizhou daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 35.6 (2017): 15-21.

²⁴⁴ This is the general impression we get from ethnographies and people who were still alive when the trade was active in the PRC. See Shan Honggen, 31-40; DSLD, 60-62.

²⁴⁵ JPLZ 249-250. The distance from Yaoguang hamlet to Guazhi hamlet (a border brokerage hamlet) is cited as roughly 60 km. JPXZ, 1317.

though it was later pushed up to six rafters. If the whole route from Yaoguang to the monopoly ports (a straight route through the Qingshui river's mainstream, though one filled with difficult shoals) including the rafter's journey walking home, could be accomplished over the course of several days, this was indeed far more rewarding than dryland transportation or agricultural work, paying as much as a fourth of a tael or every day of work, though one has to account for how rafting work was not continuously available and seasonal.²⁴⁶ Short-distance transportation fees between the monopoly brokerages suggest a somewhat lower rate of 44 copper cash per day, though this was a task that may have been considered more routine, and took less than a day's work.²⁴⁷

Direct citations of payments to rafters, which we will examine more closely later, suggest a much lower rate was being paid out, though these were still higher than payments to timber pullers and forest tenants. Two contracts from Wendou in the very late Qing cite wages of 50 copper cash a day plus provisions of meat, alcohol and rice, and a legal case from the early nineteenth century cites 87.5 copper cash a day for moving timber over a short but shallow portion of the river.²⁴⁸

In terms of working days per year, rafting work tends to be most plentiful in the winter months, when timber is moved down to the brokerage hamlets.²⁴⁹ For those with not enough land

²⁴⁶ This incorporates the most generous assumptions of 2-3 days spent rafting from Yaoguang; 2-3 days walking roughly 60 kilometers back to Yaoguang; and only two workers per raft. If one assumes that there were six rafters and a longer travel time of say 4 days each way, it could be as low as 0.1 taels per day. See by comparison the travel times for rafters along the Yuan river downstream. Wu Shaomei notes that the trip from Hongjiang to Changde (around 360 km) was ordinarily 10 days long, though it could be as short as 3 days in high flood season. This gives us a speed of somewhere between 36 km/day to 120 km/day. See also the Guazhi Zhengjiang Stele 4 [1888], in YZF.

²⁴⁷ Guazhi Zhengjiang Stele 4 [1888], YZF.

²⁴⁸ "Ti wei huishen Guizhou Liping fu Miaomi Shi Buqiaomei yin zheng la mupai dasi Wu Bujiesheng yi an," 1808, 02-01-007-026487-0003, FHA.

²⁴⁹ Shan Honggen, 23-40.

to support themselves, rafting was a vital cash supplement during the winter. “In the busy season [the *pinnong*] worked on agriculture, in the slack season they worked on rafting [*nongmang wu nong, nongxian fangpai*].”²⁵⁰ The truly landless who relied only on wages from rafting faced risk of hunger when the timber market was soft, or when it was not the season for rafting. In these circumstances, their solution was mobility, seeking short-term wage work in areas with more agricultural land, and more potential to find short-term work to eke out a subsistence, in places like Dunzhai, Xinhua, and Longli. They also sought work moving or processing timber over dryland, with wages that paid much less than what rafting could pay, enough to buy only 8-10 *jin* of millet for a day’s work.²⁵¹

Table 8: Silver-Copper Exchange Rate Citations	
1855	1:2222
1873	1:1587
1888	1:1562
1890	1:1435
1891	1:1426
1895	1:1570
1909	1:1443
Source: Long Zejiang, “Cong Qingshuijiang wenshu kan Qingdai Guizhou Miaozi diqu huobi liutong zhong de jige wenti.”	

Struggles between rafters and merchants over transportation work suggest that the economic benefits from this line of work were tilted towards the rafters, and that they were able to appeal to different parties—to the magistrates in particular—to preserve this status quo

²⁵⁰ DSLD, 59.

²⁵¹ DSLD 60; See also Shan Honggen, 31-40.

repeatedly over time. Rafting in the Qing period was not an occupation on the margin, with workers pushed close to the smallest viable wage, and merchants running so efficiently that they had nothing more to fork over. These beneficial conditions for rafters can in part be accounted for by the support that the Liping magistrate gave to the representatives of rafting interests in disputes over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which we will discuss shortly. The magistrate's approval for local regulations on rafting was sought, and proclamations (*gaoshi*) that testified to this were copied on stone tablets in the region. Rafters became a protected constituency in the region, and they were shielded from changes that merchants pushed for, namely the opening of the river to downstream rafters employed by the merchants themselves, and the optimization of labor on rafts.²⁵²

The sanctity of these customs diminished over time, as villages instead lent their segments of the river out for rents, and extra-local rafters became more common. Rental fees like those from Gaoliu hamlet in the previous chapter might be charged instead of the actual employment. Two previously cited contracts from Wendou dated to 1903 and 1904 with a single team of Han rafters for the cutting and transport over a thousand logs of timber charged a fee of 108 *wen* per log. The rafters no longer came from Wendou and Ping'ao, but a remnant of the *jiangbu* privilege system survived through a "land rent" (*dizu*) of 2 *wen* per log paid to the two hamlets.²⁵³ An account from 1883 likewise suggests that late Qing rafting had become more open to outsiders, though the absence of crucial details over their rafting itineraries makes it difficult to ascertain. Chuan Maozai from Zhijiang county, Hunan (downstream along the Yuan river basin) was murdered over the course of an argument with a man from Zhenyuan prefecture

²⁵² Wu Shaomei, "Ming zhi minguo," DSLD 58-63; Cheng Zeshi, "Cong 'jiangbu' dao 'sanfu hetong': Qingdai qingshuijiang liuyu fangmu zuzhi de shichang bianqian," *Hubei daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 45.1 (2018): 93-100.

²⁵³ Cheng Zeshi, "Cong Jiangbu."

named Peng Laosan over the rafting of timber in Maoping. The two men, who had been previously acquainted through their employment for timber merchants, show how rafters were drawn from distant locales unconnected to the *jiangbu* system into the monopoly hamlets for work.²⁵⁴ Thus it seems by the beginning of the twentieth century, transportation monopolies were being challenged by new arrangements: Extra-local workers started to make inroads, raft masters began to displace village headmen in organizing and brokering labor, and merchants placed heavier contractual duties from rations to accidental damage compensation upon the shoulders of the new labor organizers.²⁵⁵

Forest Cultivation

The first forest tenancy contracts appeared only in the late 1700s, with a multi-decade lag from the first forest buy-and-sale contracts. The appearance of these contracts reflects the sequential development of the timber industry in southeastern Guizhou, with initial harvests from easy to reach natural timber stands, followed by an initial round of afforestation, and an expanding circle of enclosure, harvesting, and afforestation

The first tenancy contract within my contract database, dated to 1786, was very simple in content, and yet already gives us a good basic understanding of how forest tenancies worked in southeastern Guizhou:

“Establishing this tenancy contract [*dianzi*] are Yang Wenyuan, Yang Wenxian, Long Qiucai of Renli and Gandong hamlet, belonging to Tianzhu county [Hunan]; Lin Tianyi of Jiuhuai hamlet [Guizhou]. [They] are to be tenants of Wendou hamlet Jiang

Zuozhou’s land, named Jiuhuai, where they are to reside, open up the mountain, plant

²⁵⁴ “Ti wei shenli Liping fu min Peng Laosan yin zheng fang mu pai shang bi Fu Maozai yi an yi lu ni jiao jian hou qing zhi shi 题为审理黎平府民彭老三因争放木排伤毙傅毛崽一案依律拟绞监候请旨事,” 1883, 02-01-007-035612-0004, FHA.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. The citation is for an itinerary of unknown distance from Nanwuchong to Wudoudaxi/Wudouxì, a stream that is connected to the Qingshui river.

millet and so on. In accordance with the landlord, they have absolutely no past crimes, and are not permitted to let strangers loiter. If they repeatedly transgress the landlords, they will be taken to officials for investigation with this contract. They transgress at their own peril. This contract is the truth.”²⁵⁶

From this document, we can already ascertain that forest tenants did not have to come from the local labor pool. In this case, the tenants were from Tianzhu county, the first county across the border in Hunan on the Qingshui river, as well as Jiuhuai hamlet, a hamlet of immigrants close to Wendou. These tenants from outside the locality did not come in an organized fashion. Instead, they came either alone or in small independent groups seeking work. The tenants in this contract were in the supplicant position, and they were anonymous, with no discernable link to the locality other than their contractual relationship with the landlord. Hence they were treated with some distrust, placed in the social category of wandering shack peoples (*pengmin*) who brought in dangerous outsiders. In exchange for their work, the landlords mainly compensated their tenants with the right to subsist on the forest for several years by intercropping millet, in addition to other crops that were not explicitly mentioned in the contract itself, like maize, sweet potato, and buckwheat.

Table 9: Forest Tenancy Contracts in Wendou Hamlet, 1780-1910				
	1780-1814	1814-1828	1828-1856	1863-1910
Total Shares	81	85.5	94	72
Tenant Shares as Percent of Total	42.59	42.11	39.36	40.28
Landlord Shares as Percent of Total	57.41	57.89	60.64	59.72

²⁵⁶ JYZ, 40.

Contracts with a 5 Year Maturity Clause as Percent of Total	15	40	50	34.8
Contracts with a 3 Year Maturity Clause as Percent of Total	5.0	10.0	0	47.6
Contracts with Any Maturity Clause as Percent of Total	20	50	50	85.7
Contracts with Any Crop Cultivation Clause as Percent of Total	50	25	30	14.3
Source: BZR				

The broader dataset of tenant contracts that come after this document shows us the same general picture. A substantial proportion of documented tenants came from outside the local labor market, and can come from as far as Hunan, though the majority of tenants came from the same village as the landlord. They were never organized through labor brokers, and non-monetary compensation through the intercropping of grains and tubers remained constant. They almost always worked on forests. Paddy tenancies were rare, owing to the small quantity of suitable land, in contrast to the abundance of forest land concentrated in the hands of relatively few landlords.

Table 10: Surnames on Tenancy Contracts from Wendou Hamlet, 1780-1910		
	Number	Percentage
Proportion of Non-Local Tenants	35/87	40.23%
Proportion of Listed Tenants Surnamed Jiang/Long	72/142	50.7%
Proportion of Listed Landlords Surnamed Jiang/Long	284/301	94.35%
Source: BZR		

Forest cultivation, as I have explained in more detail in the previous chapter, did not require a lot of capital, and most of what was put together was the land owned by the landlord, and the labor from the tenants' own backs. Status distinction mattered little for this line of work. Both women and people from economic backgrounds high and low engaged in forest cultivation work. The technical demands on forest tenants were not arduous, and most people, whether they were landlords or strangers from far downriver, could do the job with basic instruction.

Both ethnographic accounts and contemporary sources from the Qing show that the total compensation for forest tenants was low. The first and largest component of tenant compensation was the right to subsist on the timberland by intercropping corn and millet. Millet, which was the main subsistence crop for tenant farmers explicitly stated in Qing-era contracts, could yield enough for a family to live on for three months (or likely a single adult male for most of the year) using slash-and-burn methods for every 3-5 *mu* of land.²⁵⁷ On leased forest lands, likely to be well over 10 *mu* in size, the yield of intercropped millet was enough to provide for the basic nutrition of the tenant for several years, while waiting for the fir seedlings to close canopy and make intercropping difficult.

²⁵⁷ JPLZ, 187-188.

The second component of tenant compensation was a future share (*gu*) in the timber crop, typically 40-50% of the harvest. In theory this could yield a very large income for the tenant. If the tenant had a 50% share on a 10 *mu* plot, with a density of 100 logs per *mu*, sold at a gross stumpage price of 0.2 taels per log, they could have earned 100 taels for his three to five years of labor, well above what an ordinary worker with no special skills could ever hope to earn. However, opportunities to earn timber shares through tenancies were not continuous. Moreover, timber crop shares could only be realized in the distant future, typically at least twenty years, with thirty and even forty year maturities not uncommon. The tenant can die before they get a chance to cash out (not an unlikely outcome given the length of time before maturity), the forest can burn down or suffer from theft, prices fluctuated greatly, and tenants may suffer short-term economic hardships that compel them to sell their shares early. Thus when sold, in practice, harvest shares came with large discounts.

This was reflected in actual tenant behavior when it comes to futures sales, and depressed their cash incomes. See for example how an elderly forest tenant who lived in the early Republic named Long Yuanfu traced his movement from one forest tenancy to another to earn a living. In 1912, Long Yuanfu served as tenant for Long Yunlan on a timberland plot of over 50 *mu*, to which he was given a 50% share. By 1924, when the forest was already mature, he sold his shares because of hardship for 30,000 copper cash. In 1921, he leased another plot from Long Yunlan of 40 and 3-4000 trees, in exchange for a 40% share. He once again sold his share for 30,000 copper cash out of hardship in 1931. While the lump sum payments were deceptively large, Long Yuanfu had earned just over 3000 copper cash every year for his work over two decades, though he probably participated in odd seasonal jobs in between. Such cash earnings

made for a very bare existence, and it was no surprise that he had lived in a poorly constructed home of one *jian* that was barely able to keep out the wind and rain.²⁵⁸

Other forest tenants reported a similar life course. It was typical for tenants to draw upon these shares when they had an urgent need for cash, such as socially-important rituals like burials or weddings, or natural disaster, and hunger.²⁵⁹ The ethnographers in the PRC may have had an inclination to highlight the exploitation of forest tenants, but select examinations of direct sales of shares from tenants to landlords documented in the Qing tell roughly the same story. Whether Qing-era tenants sold out of economic distress or not, the cash they received was well below the potential income from the eventual timber sale, in a time when timber was comparatively dear (See Table 11). In this sense, forest tenancies resembled other wage-earning work in function, providing a cash supplement in combination with some agricultural work, or other seasonal labor work to piece together subsistence.

Table 11: Qing-era Tenant Payments					
Collection	Year	Sale Price	Tenant Share	No. of Tenants	Annualized Cash Wage
BZR B0011	1799	25.5 taels	50%	3	1.70
BZR B0015	1801	3.9 taels	16.7%	2	1.17
BZR B0022	1808	15 taels	50%	5	0.60

These Qing-era tenants had different backgrounds. There was a group of three brothers from Gandong zhai who migrated to Wendou and leased timberland from the Jiangs; unknown tenants who were merely mentioned as having leased a property in which a Jiang kinsman from

²⁵⁸ DSLD, 20.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

the same branch owned shares; a group of five (apparently related) tenants from Tianzhu county who moved upstream to Ping'ao and leased a timberland, and did not have cash to pay for a burial. They do not appear in any more contracts that survived in family archives, and so we cannot sketch out their lifepaths and determine how many plots they worked over how many years in the same way that we can with tenants from the Republic who were interviewed by PRC ethnographers. However, these contracts do appear to tell a similar story of tenants who were paid much less than what the forests were potentially worth, and lived a bare life with little disposable income.

Since the first forest tenancy contracts appeared in the late-1700s, they generally became more restrictive over time. In particular, the forest maturity clauses—clauses dictating how many years after initial planting a new forest should close its canopy—gradually shortened from five years to three years. Explicit permission to cultivate subsistence crops like millet also became rarer in the contracts. Both changes reflect a tendency towards greater intensification of forest cropping, defined by shorter cultivation cycles and shorter recovery periods for the soil. More importantly for forest tenants, this tendency resulted in a shorter window within which they can subsist on the forest land. This was effectively a reduction in overall compensation despite the steady share of timber crop futures that tenants were issued, but it also took away what was perhaps the main draw of forest tenancies to itinerant single males.

Migrant Work

Hunanese migrants came to the region over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seeking work. Some contracts show that they were able to find forest tenancies in villages like Wendou or Ping'ao, however, it was generally difficult for them to actually settle within indigenous villages themselves. *Pengmin* who were excluded from Wendou village settled in areas where

landowners gave them express permission, and it was upon these kernels that immigrant villages around Wendou like Cenwu and Jiuhuai grew.²⁶⁰ Some Hunanese immigrants did manage to settle within indigenous villages, but these settlement rights were often conditional on a contribution they made to the village, such as service for the village river crossing.²⁶¹ For this reason, they were unlikely to have worked in the protected trades like rafting and timber pulling, at least until later in the Qing. Nevertheless, the flow of migrants did not stop, and they found other forms of work in the region.

Forest tenancies were probably the biggest line of work for migrants. But alongside forest tenancies, migrants also worked in specialized crafts and trades that serviced the basin's *shanke* elites. Craft work may initially be temporary. The largest pre-modern structure in the basin was built by a group of over 300 craftsmen from Hunan who were invited by the Yao lineage of wealthy *shanke* in Yaoguang hamlet. Some of these migrant craftsmen and tenants may have remained and settled in villages for highly circumstantial reasons. A lineage of tilemakers from Huangmen hamlet for example were said to have earned their settlement rights by post facto acceptance of the burial of an ancestor's father in the village, after it turned out that a local family took possession of their tiles without payment.²⁶² Migrants also serviced the indigenous population as petty shopkeepers, who sold sundries from outside the basin, and were occasionally seen in murder and theft cases from the imperial archives. The Yaos of Yaoguang began their lives in Guizhou in this line of work, peddling food to passing rafters and merchants, but managed to settle by way of marriage to a local family.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Zhu, *Yimin shichang*, 50.

²⁶¹ Wang, "Ruzhuquan."

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Hekou xiang, *Yaoguang zhi*, 197-203.

The lives of most other Hunanese migrants are less visible, and often the most that can be seen of them in the sources as brief mentions as listed stonemasons in steles, or ritual masters for the selection of propitious dates and places. There were many challenges to their integration, among them restrictions on a variety of activities from purchasing land, burial, exclusion from local rituals, limited opportunities in certain lines of work, and even the collection of firewood from forests. The most successful among them, however, found economic niches in local society, while learning Dong or Miao language and culture, inter-marrying with locals, and benefitting like many others had from the upstream flow of silver from the timber trade.²⁶⁴

Upstream Flows: Retaining Surplus from the Timber Trade in the Qingshui River Basin

Wage work came in a variety of forms in the Qingshui river basin, from short-term arrangements that provided opportunistic sources of cash, to more rigid obligations to grow and take care of trees until they reached maturity. We know that participation in wage work was broad. However, it remains unclear in the literature just how important wage work was for sustaining the livelihoods of people in the basin in aggregate. In the following section, I will be using a combination of different sources to give us a sense of just how important wage work was in absolute numbers to the regional economy, and what impact it had on the region's poorer households. This context is crucial for understanding the bitterness of the conflicts in the nineteenth century over compensation and participation in wage work.

No surviving records of receipts from timber tariffs or brokerage fees on passing timber are able to give us a direct indication of the size of the timber trade in the Qingshui river basin with any degree of precision. However, there are dispersed and impressionistic records that give us a sense of the general magnitude of the trade. Similar work has been attempted before by Meng Zhang. Using records from memorials sent to the emperor stores in the First Historical Archives,

²⁶⁴ Zhu, *Yimin shichang*, 85.

specifically from the returns of the Chen Guan 晨關 in Chenzhou 晨州, Hunan timber taxing station, which represents timber sourced from the Qingshui and Yuan river basins, she estimates that the passing trade was worth 327,229 taels in 1730, and 803,726 taels by 1801.

Her work is valuable for giving us a sense of directionality for the timber trade from the 1730s onwards. These confirm the early decades 1800s were a time of strength in the inter-regional timber trade, relative to what came before and after. However, it is perhaps less useful for giving us a sense of the timber trade's true absolute size in the Qing.²⁶⁵ The Liping prefectural gazetteer suggests, impressionistically, the trade was in fact much larger, at the scale of 2-3 million taels, or the equivalent of roughly 600,000-900,000 logs a year for the Qingshui river basin alone. Later sources, from *lijin* records in the early Republic, suggest that the timber trade was indeed of this general magnitude (1.9 to 2.9 million taels, or 590,000 to 790,000 logs of timber), if timber production levels have been maintained at the same general level, as other measures of timber activity like contract writing and local transaction volumes suggest they did.²⁶⁶ Even as these numbers are imprecise, they arguably represent a more credible representation of how big the trade was overall.

²⁶⁵ This is certainly part of what Zhang tries to tell us about the customs data. Officials had an incentive to undercount, and trading volume was probably much higher than what the numbers tell us.

²⁶⁶ See page 98 for contract activity data. While there are fundamental inconsistencies with the data, *lijin* tax receipts from the very early ROC does suggest that passing timber was of this general size. *Shina Kishū no ringyō* 支那貴州の林業, (Taipei: Taiwan sōtoku kanbō chōka 台灣總督官房調査課, 1920), 40-42.

Table 12: Impressionistic Estimates of Timber Volume			
Source	Area	Estimate	Period
Fan Yichun, “Long Distance Trade,” 211-213.	Wuhu gongguan and Longjiang gongguan (All Yangzi, including the Ganjiang basin)	1/5th of Yangzi trade volume passing through customs	1763-1783
Yang Yougeng, “Han minzu”	Wangzhai/Qingshuiji ang	2-3,000,000 taels/year	Early 1800s
JPLZ, 272-273.	Wangzhai/Qingshuiji ang	180,000 liangma/year [2.1-2.3M yuan/year]	1919
“Hankou zhi mucai maoyi.”	Yuanjiang and Xiangjiang	6,000,000 taels	1920s
DSLDD, 68.	Guizhou, whole province	748,900 yuan	1921
Wu Zhonglun, <i>Shanmu</i> .	Nanjing/Yangzi River System	10,000,000 yuan/year	-1924
JPLZ, 272-273.	Wangzhai/Qingshuiji ang	20,000 liangma/year [260,000 yuan/year at most]	1926
Notes: Fan cites the memorials on customs revenues and local gazeteers. Fan, “Long Distance Trade,” 211-219. Note that the figure cited from 1926 coincides with one of the most serious droughts in Guizhou’s recorded history.			

Small payments trickled down to workers and villagers for each of the 600,000-900,000 logs of timber that flowed downstream through the Qingshui river every year. Scattered citations in contracts tell us that *shanke* merchants often paid anywhere from 0.2 to 0.5 taels for every log they purchased at the stump.²⁶⁷ Most of this silver accrued to timberland owners, but they will have already advanced a portion of the stumpage price to the tenants, who were likely to have

²⁶⁷ On occasion, prices per log on proceeds received by the timberland owners are directly cited. Two price per log citations in the late Qing state that timber was sold for 1.9 taels and 0.4 taels in 1886 and 1908 respectively. A citation in a strong period of the timber market, from 1820, gives us a price of 0.2 taels per log. Citations in the later Republic give us 0.58 taels per log and 0.5 yuan per log. See BZR E0072, E0059; QSJWS 1-1-1-017; Zhang, *Mucai*, P190; DSLDD, 92.

sold their harvest shares long ago. Land rents (*dizu*) were paid to local villages in different ways, including lump sum payments per year, and per log fees of several copper cash.²⁶⁸

Transportation loomed large in merchant account books. While there are no direct indications of how much costs for rafting and other transportation-related labor were worth on a per-log basis in these sources, among the payments logged in the account book *Miscellaneous Expenditures in the Journey to the Miao* (*Wang Miao Za Yong* 往苗杂用), wage payments regularly appear as the largest numbers, far outstripping payments for materials, food, and fees. One entry records, for example: “labor silver for raft tying [*zha pai gongyin*], 921 taels,” numbers exceeding anything else on the ledger.²⁶⁹ The same can be said for an individual account we have previously used from the Republic. A total of 6820 *dayang* yuan were used to move 1300 logs of timber to Maoping, to be sent forward to Hongjiang. Of this, 4196 yuan was used for the various expenditures related to transportation, in order of size: Wages for fifty-six rafters, ropes, sawing and other miscellaneous labor, duties, wages for raft tying, and so on.²⁷⁰

For transporting logs from stump to the riverbank, merchants and owners paid as much as 0.1 taels per log, less if the property had access to a floodway or was close to shore.²⁷¹ Moving the timber from the riverbank to the monopoly brokerage towns, as we have seen previously, cost merchants over 0.1 taels per log for villages like Wendou in the lower reaches of the Qingshui river basin, and at least 0.2-0.3 taels per log for villages further upstream.²⁷² A rare and especially

²⁶⁸ See the later section on consumption for land rents paid out to Wendou village, and Chapter 2 on *dizu* for Gui’e and Gaoliu.

²⁶⁹ WMZY, 8174.

²⁷⁰ DSLD, 75.

²⁷¹ Yang Yougeng tells us that in the Republic, 600 logs that were transported for 100 *dayang* yuan, which comes out to the equivalent of about 0.11 taels per log for land transportation. Yang Yougeng, “Kuidan Dongzhai,” 79.

²⁷² Prices for transportation in the lower basin appear to be in the range of just over 0.1 taels. Again, I take this from the Wendou contract in Cheng, “Cong jiangbu,” where transporting each log from Wendou hamlet (roughly 30 kilometers from Wangzhai) cost 108 *wen*. At 1 tael for every 1000 *wen*, this comes out to a cost per log kilometer of about 0.0036 taels. If the furthest

detailed account of costs for the transport of timber that we have seen in the previous chapter from Jiachi hamlet, in the lower reaches of the Qingshui river basin, affirms that a ballpark figure of 0.1 taels per log is a reasonable number to use as a representative for the “toll” that transportation and transport labor exacted on each log of passing timber, and retained to support subsistence. While this account shows that perhaps part of the top line cost for moving timber rafts to the monopoly brokerages included the cost of materials to build and move timber (such as ropes), a large proportion of fees paid for transportation can still be attributed to labor. It also dates from the Republic, when the market for transportation of timber had become more open, and the bargaining power of rafters resident to the basin had weakened. It states: “Taking the cost of tying loose timber into rafts; binding; ropes; *shuifu* [rafters] and ropes big and small; food; and travelling costs, the total is equivalent to 16.11 taels of silver. Distributed for 165 logs, every log is due 0.0977 taels. After excluding 34 logs of private timber [*simu* 私木], the remainder totals 131 logs of timber, and the remainder due is 12.79 taels.”²⁷³

upriver logs that are flowing in at volume come from as far as Jianhe (200 li or 100 km away from Maoping), the cost per log transport from there based on this rate will be about 0.36 taels. Shan Honggen, *Jinping Wenshu*, 1-12; JPXZ, 1317.

²⁷³ “Chu mai Nanbaoqiaotou gongshan mucai mingxi zhang 出卖南包桥头共山木材明细账,” JCSY 4, 314. What exactly “private timber” or *simu* 私木 refers to here is not clear. It may be that this refers to timber that is owned by the merchants who had organized the rafting, and therefore exempt their own timber from the cost calculations. The operation referred to here and its profits are divided into two shares. The fact that the operation was divided into shares may also signal a change in how timber transportation was organized by the Republic, no longer done under the umbrella of a singular *shanke*, but between parties of different origins.

Table 13: Individual Account of Logging and Transport Costs		
Item	Cost (taels)	Percent of Total
Logging and Overland Transport (<i>xiutou</i> 修头 ²⁷⁴)	4.81	19.75%
Binding and Small Ropes	0.49	2.01%
Raft Assembly Wages	3.38	13.88%
Foreign Nails (<i>yangding</i> 洋钉) and Stacking Costs	0.44	1.81%
Payments from Wangzhai <i>Hanghu</i> to Workers	4.11	16.88%
Large Ropes	4.80	19.70%
Additional Large Ropes	4.80	19.70%
Additional Small Ropes	0.318	1.31%
Food	0.8	3.29%
Return Journey Fee (<i>huijia lufei</i> 回家路费)	0.4	1.64%
TOTAL	24.35	100.00%

The benefits of this flow of silver upstream for work accrued primarily to non-elite households in the region. A pre-1949 survey of 103 households in the littoral Yaoguang hamlet showed that 64% of non-landlord households participated in rafting for wages, and 31% of the total relied on a combination of rafting and other wage work. The latter were overwhelmingly composed of households classified as *gunong* (wage-working peasants), who had no land to their

²⁷⁴ *Xiutou* is a technical term that refers to harvesting timber and moving over land. The term comes from how the heads of the logs are given a rounded protrusion to ease their movement overland. JCSY 4, 538.

name.²⁷⁵ Another pre-1949 survey by Yang Yougeng of Kuidan (again a more inland village with fewer opportunities for rafting work) shows that while timber pulling work contributed to 32% of the village's aggregate income, it contributed to 71.3% of wage working peasant (*gunong*) incomes, and 47% of poor peasant (*pinnong*) incomes. From his tally of men over the age of 35 in the village, well over half of the poor peasants spent at least six months of their calendar year for timber pulling, and nearly all of the poorest wage working peasants spent more than nine months of their calendar year for timber pulling.²⁷⁶

Table 14: Estimates of Cost Structure Based on Early PRC Ethnographic Research		
	Cost Per Log (Yuan)	Percent of Hankow Sale Price
Stumpage	0.5	2%
Harvesting	0.15	0.6%
Overland	1.2	4.9%
Rafting to Wangzhai	1	4%
Rafting to Hankow	6.75	27.6%
Hankow Sales Price	24.48 yuan/log	
Source: DSLD, 92.		

Table 15: Proportion of Income from Different Sources in Kuidan				
Class	Income from Pulling 拉木收入	Forest Cultivation Income 林地收入	Agricultural Cultivation Income 耕地收入	Total
Wage-Working Peasants 雇农	71.3%	28%	0.7%	100%
Poor Peasants 贫农	47%	24%	29%	100%

²⁷⁵ DSLD, 59.

²⁷⁶ Yang, "Kuidan Dongzhai," 79-81.

Middle-Lower Peasants 下中农	23%	9%	68%	100%
Source: Taken from Yang Yougeng, "Kuidan Dongzhai," 81.				

Thus, in general, both the estimates from the Qing, and concrete accounts from the Republic show that large quantities, and perhaps the majority of the money spent by merchants for operations in the Qingshui river basin went to the transportation of timber, both overland and on water. Moreover, this money disproportionately supported the incomes of the poorest households in the region. It was in this segment of society that wage work opportunities were most vital, and for whom changes to arrangements in how work was distributed had the most impact. Its size and importance to the bottom lines of merchant account books, and its outsize importance to people who relied on wage work for subsistence, made transportation in general, and rafting in particular a point of conflict for different interest groups in the Qingshui river basin, subjected to extraordinary regulation and documentation.

Conflict and Cooperation

Rafting work rode the swells and troughs of timber prices and trading volumes over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Conflicts between workers and merchants emerged, as they fought to contest regulations that determined how much rafters would be paid and how their work might be organized. In what follows, I will go over several major disputes between rafters and merchants in the Qing dynasty to provide impressions of how relations between wage laborers and wage payers were repeatedly settled, and upon what principles they did battle.

Making the Most of the Prosperous Era

Timberland owners benefited from unusually high prices for timber in the early nineteenth century. Rafters also sought to gain from the ebullience of the market for timber in this time. In

1802, close to the height of the Qingshui river timber trade, the timber merchants Long Wancai and others filed a complaint against Yaoguang hamlet for multiple abuses in the business of transporting timber. Yaoguang hamlet, as mentioned, was located in a major confluence of waterways with the mainstream of the Qingshui river and was an important port for re-tying timber rafts. Surveys from the late Republic show that agricultural land was extremely scarce in the hamlet: The little that was available was intensively prepared, using cattle for plowing, and going through three rounds of weeding. After all this, the most it could provide was enough for only nine months of consumption. Households accordingly had to scrape together income from other sources to buy food imported from Jianhe and Liping to make up for the remainder, and much of this income came from participating in the timber industry.²⁷⁷

When these regulated rafting fees were in place, merchants ordinarily stayed at an inn, and it was in these inns that they were able to hire rafters by commission from the locals. However, it seems that over time, villages like Yaoguang which upriver merchants frequented to make timber transactions and hire rafters found that negotiating directly through headmen rather than by commission through the inns gave them the bargaining power to manipulate rafting fees in their favor. Merchants considered this arrangement conducive to extortion, and this was the main reason behind their complaint. Hence the prefect ordered that merchants were to hire only by commission through the inns. Furthermore, he ordered that precedent be respected: The regulatory fees are not to budge one *fen* higher or lower from those originally set in the Qianlong period.²⁷⁸

Respect for precedent was a frequent theme in prefectural rulings, and shows one way in which the original non-statutory concessions to the indigenes of southeastern Guizhou remained

²⁷⁷ JPXZ, 1494-1495; DSLD, 62.

²⁷⁸ DSLD, 63.

firmly embedded principles of governance for officials. Another stele carved in 1892, this time recording an order issued by the Tianzhu county sub-prefect (*tongzhi*) cites the same principle, saying that there are to be no additions or subtractions to fees set by the old regulations.²⁷⁹

However, compliance with precedent was not the sole principle upon which the benefits of rafters relied. There was also a sense that locals were entitled to this work because of their poverty, or the poverty of their environment, without which they could not subsist. This principle was used in stele inscriptions in passing, with reference to the connection between rafting work and the poor. An especially sharp, and combative statement of these principles can be found in a stele that was also in Peiliang hamlet, where we previously read a *kuan* stele declaring that rafting work was to be preserved for locals:

“In recent years, people’s hearts and minds have been wicked, transgressing borders [*yue jie*] to obtain profit. Downstream workers have come up to take on tying and rafting [work]; upstream merchants, in their buying and selling along the river, have been making immediate buys and immediate sells. [text unclear] They have no regard for the poverty of households; they only crave their personal interest...[We] still fear hunger and cold. We who have families, how can we accept hunger and cold? While they await labor [to move the rafts], we sit here to await our deaths [*bi shi yi yi dai lao, wodeng zuo yi dai bi* 彼是逸以待劳, 我等坐以待毙].

Owing to this, each man is rendered sick [*you shi ren ren ji, ge ge shang huai* 由是人疾, 个个伤怀]; each one is harmed. For this reason, we have gathered the headmen of every zhai to jointly issue a *kuan* declaration, forever setting regulations: Upriver timber may only be rafted by upriver workers. [They] may not fiddle with the

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

jianggui; Downstream workers can only receive timber and send it downriver. They must divide clearly the borders of the river.”²⁸⁰

Written in the same year as the other Peiliang stele, in 1851, this text is an elaborate exposition of the principles that village-level organizations used in their defense of rafting privileges. It equates the violation of rafting customs with the loss of subsistence for Peiliang villagers, and even their deaths. Unusually for sources of any kind in this time, it articulates these harms in terms of the individual, against “each man” and “each one.” The distribution of rafting work in the region was argued to fulfill, alongside custom, an obligation towards households that had few other options for survival.

Exploiting Vulnerabilities

The means of hiring rafters, whether to hire through some form of broker or to deal directly with village heads, was one vulnerability that rafter interests could exploit. But the greatest of vulnerabilities lay in the Qingshui river itself. Villagers were able to surveil and intercept the movement of men and timber, especially as they moved through bottlenecks on the river. Even a small harvest of eight logs being pulled down a mountain from the Guazhi monopoly hamlet *guanshan* (官山) forest in 1793 could be caught by man who was cutting grass (the phrasing was he “went to the mountain to cut grass and saw [the loggers] *fu shan ge cao du jian* 赴山割草督见).²⁸¹ The man was in turn able to alert other villagers and intercept them by the river. Just as villages competing for the business of the timber monopolies could block the river to get different parties on the negotiating table, pullers and rafters occasionally used the ease of

²⁸⁰ JPBW, 56.

²⁸¹ “Ti wei shen de Liping fu min Wen Xinqiao deng yin zufa shanmu zhengnao ouda Xu Qiaofu deng yansi wu ming yi an yi lü jun ni jiao jianhou shi 题为审得黎平府民文新乔等因阻伐杉木争闹殴打许乔幅等淹毙五命一案依律均拟绞监候事,” 1793, 02-01-07-08225-014, FHA.

intercepting people and timber moving through the river to pursue demands such as the increase of wages from the timber merchants.

One known incident of rafters blocking the river happened in 1898, led by a Tianzhu county man named Peng Shoumin. Peng and his associates extorted money from the merchants by charging them fees for “water labor” (*shuili*), referring to some form of rafting or re-tying work, though the work itself might be nominal.²⁸² A separate stele citing a petition that was also addressed to the Liping prefect dated to 1888, brings out the the litany of similar complaints from the merchants in more specific terms.²⁸³ In it, the merchants complain that they have been subjected to extortion year after year, as rafters kept pushing prices up, and securing rafting jobs on their own before timber had even been sold. The merchants were unhappy about their inability to choose which rafters to hire. They were also unhappy about the number of workers hired on the rafts. Where previously a team of two rafters was sufficient for a raft of 100 logs of varying sizes, the merchants claimed that by their time the number of workers per raft was six to seven each. Those among them who refused these arrangements would have their rafts blocked, with the rafters carrying swords and spears, threatening to throw themselves into a fight. In one especially alarming incident that the merchants cited in their complaint, the rafters even gathered in a group of over one hundred in Maoping, carrying swords and western guns (*yangpao*) in blocking the river of all its passing timber. In proposing solutions to the prefect, the merchants referred derisively to the rafters as “mountain hamlet peasants (*shanzhai nongmin*),” whose “greed and idiocy vary,” and hence would be hard to keep in check.²⁸⁴

A previous petition was made to the Zhenyuan prefect in Guizhou to stop the practice, and the Zhenyuan prefect responded by issuing a proclamation of restriction. However Peng

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ YZF, 275.

²⁸⁴ YZF, 275-276; DSLD, 63-64.

Shoumin and his associates defied the magistrate and continued with their protest. The blockage ultimately had to be resolved by force. A succeeding petition resulted in orders from the Liping prefect to arrest Peng Shoumin and the other rafters, to be executed by a captain (*shaoguan* 哨官) from the local garrison and the troops under his command. Despite this resolution by force, it is telling that in deciding the principle behind his resolution of the incident, the prefect still cited the principle of historical precedent (*lilai jiugui* 历来旧规), and warned merchants not to use this incident as a pretext to engage in misdeeds.²⁸⁵ Almost two hundred years after the Yongzheng emperor's campaign to conquer the Miao frontier, the wariness from officials in upsetting the status quo and being seen as going against Miao interests was still discernible.

One eventual solution to the tensions brewing in the region, seen in another case, was to break the adherence to historical precedent and make concessions to the different parties. Responding to the incident previously mentioned, when over a hundred armed rafters blocked the river in Maoping hamlet, the *zongban* sent the monopoly hamlet headmen to discuss terms with the rafters, conceding additions of 20 wen per raft for different itineraries. This meant that a hypothetical raft making the short trip from Guazhi hamlet to Maoping hamlet would see its rafting labor fees increased from 100 wen to 120 wen. The rafters were content with this, and went home without incident. The merchants on the other hand were granted the concession that rafting fees would be calculated on a per fascicle rather than a per rafter basis. This was also accepted by the rafters without dissent, though the merchants were also warned not to shortchange the rafters in payments under the new standard. The break with historical precedent is notable however, as prefects have tended to prefer the security of the status quo. This

²⁸⁵ DSLD, 63.

departure warned of a new period for timber industry, more fluid and competitive, with less of the security that more prosperous times afforded.²⁸⁶

Consumption: Evidence at the Level of Individuals

In this final section, we will turn to the impact of wage work on rafters, tenants and craftsmen and the material aspects of their daily lives. How wage work changed consumption patterns at the level of individual lives has generally remained invisible to us despite the great quantities of contracts and disputes that have been left behind in the Qingshui river basin. Scattered, anecdotal evidence, mainly from legal cases in the Qing imperial archives used here make the case that wage work in the Qingshui region indeed empowered the poor of the region to make a modest living, and purchase small everyday luxuries from the market at a level one might not expect from a “peripheral” region.

Some of the best compensated wage-workers in the region were migrant craftsmen from Hunan. Records of what they did and what they had were sometimes found in legal cases that made their way into the Qing imperial archives. The cases we do see with some description of their homes and belongings suggest that while the quality of their housing was poor—it was most common to see them as dwellers of rudimentary shacks in locations at some distance from the main village they were associated with—they did have plenty of material possessions, and ate quite well. An ironworker from Baoqing, Hunan who lived in a grass hut and had a small group of apprentices was found with a set of indigo-blue clothing, an umbrella, a jar, a pot, and a cloth bag containing property documents; a share in a timberland plot, a loan document, and cash worth 170 wen.²⁸⁷ Another Hunan immigrant, who was found murdered in an isolated place, 100

²⁸⁶ YZF, 275-276; DSLD 63-64.

²⁸⁷ “Ti wei shenli Liping Tan Guotai yu Mi Liankui dou’ou wu chuo Liu Chaozong shensi yi an yi lü ni jiao jian hou qing zhi shi 题为审理黎平府覃帼太与米连魁斗殴误戮刘潮宗身死一案依律拟绞监候请旨事,” 1809, 02-01-007-026652-0001, FHA.

li from the prefectural seat, and without witnesses, and for whom only an inventory of belongings could be made, owned various clothing and towels, earrings and bands, a pot, chickens, corn, rice, pork fat, and tobacco.²⁸⁸ A tilemaker from Chenzhou, Hunan, who stayed in the upper floor of an indigenous host family's home with a nephew, ended up murdering his host after his expectations about the food he ought to be getting were not met.²⁸⁹ He had heard that nearby people who were also hosting craftsmen (*dai jinren*) provided chicken meat with every meal, while he was fed a modest meal of rice and wine for breakfast.²⁹⁰

Migrant craftsmen who moved to the Qingshui river basin thus seem to have been well-fed (and expected to be well-fed). They owned a wide range of household items, and did not lack in material goods, excepting perhaps their flimsy shack homes. They even accumulated savings in the form of contracts. Certainly not all Hunanese migrants were like this. Some came as vagrants.²⁹¹ However, marriage and children were absent from the lives of the migrants in these cases. They appear to have come as single men and stayed this way. Occasionally they came with single male relatives, but discussion of wives and children from Hunan are, to my knowledge, absent in legal cases, steles, and contracts. Indeed, perhaps one reason why their belongings were inventoried was because they died alone with no witnesses to speak about the circumstances behind their death. That is to say, while they may have enjoyed material welfare, these men

²⁸⁸ “Ti wei te can Liping xian jingli Jiang Jin deng shufang minren Xu Dalai jia bei qie yi wu yi an qing zhi yi chu shi 题为特参黎平县经历蒋锦等疏防民人许大来家被窃衣物一案请旨议处事,” 1813, 02-01-03-08996-022, FHA.

²⁸⁹ “Ti wei shenli Liping fu Miaoren Wu Laoshai yin koujiao oushang Ou Laoyan shensi yi an 题为审理黎平府苗人吴老晒因口角殴伤欧老岩身死一案依律拟绞监候请旨事,” 1782, 02-01-007-023496-0020, FHA.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ “Ti wei hui shen Guizhou Liping fu Yang Laoba qi yin tao jiu wei de shang bi Xie Changxian ni jiao yi an ying ling xiang cha ling xing tuo ni shi 题为会审贵州黎平府杨老八乞因讨酒未得伤毙谢昌贤拟绞一案应令详查另行妥拟事,” 1804, 02-01-007-026021-0009, FHA.

suffered ritual and social poverty, confined to the margins of indigenous communities into which they moved.

Rafters, on the other hand, were a step below the craftsmen in terms of income. Individual cash wages reflected their position in the economy, with daily wage rates at around the level which an ordinary, unskilled construction worker elsewhere in the Qing southwest might expect.²⁹² The two contracts we have seen on the breakdown of the *jiangbu* privilege system showed us that a group of five or more Han workers who came to Wendou hamlet were paid on the order of 50 *wen* for every day of work, plus provisions for transporting 1400 ordinary timbers and 400 small timbers: “Moreover, there are the food, threads, and tobacco consumed on the [shacks atop the raft]. Aside from handing these over for use, every day, it is only permitted to pay out 50 *wen* in copper cash.”²⁹³ The payment for the other contract offered the same daily rate, and at least in name provisions the rafters with alcohol, meat and rice. A murder case from 1808 mentions that four local rafters were offered a fixed rate of 350 *wen*, or 87.5 *wen* per person to move timber through a shallow part of the river. A fight ensued when five men came to assist the four rafters and split the 350 *wen*.²⁹⁴ There were good cash earnings to be made for rafters when such work was available.

Inventories of what rafters owned do not appear in the archives, again, perhaps owing to the different circumstances of their murders, which were not anonymous, were not committed in far-flung shacks, and typically had witnesses. The little we see suggests they indeed had enough

²⁹² For reference 0.122 taels a day is cited for long-term farmhands in Li and Van Zanden, “Before the Great Divergence? Comparing the Yangzi Delta and the Netherlands at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century,” *The Journal of Economic History* 72, no. 4 (2012): 978, and over 60 copper cash per day in Christine Moll-Murata, “Legal Conflicts Concerning Wage Payments in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century China: The Baxian Cases,” in Jane Kate Leonard and Theobald Ulrich eds., *Money in Asia (1200-1900)*, (Brill, 2015), 278.

²⁹³ Cheng, “Cong Jiangbu,” 98.

²⁹⁴ “Ti wei huishen Guizhou Liping fu Miaomi Shi Buqiaomei yin zheng la mupai dasi Wu Bujiesheng yi an,” 1808, 02-01-007-026487-0003, FHA.

disposable income to spend on goods that were not strictly for survival. A rafter named Zhou Laonen accidentally killed his father-in-law after an argument made while he had fallen drunk—he had visited his in-laws, and was drinking with his brother-in-law and father-in-law. Zhou berated his father-in-law (who was also a rafter) for extorting a Hunanese timber merchant for an extra fee to finish the delivery of his timber, despite having already received one silver tael in payment, to which Zhou's father in law accused him of “taking the timber merchant's side” (*tanhū muke* 袒护木客, which also goes to show that there were additional opportunities to quickly obtain cash beyond just rafting work itself).²⁹⁵ Rafters were also companions of timber merchants, who entrusted them with helping split up large amounts of silver to hide in their garments in case they encountered bandits. Merchant account books show that merchants probably took care of the rafter's rations (as other sources indeed suggest), and that they at least benefited from a better diet than forest tenants, with rice and dried tofu among the provisions that merchants bought on their way.²⁹⁶

Kinsmen made additional contributions to the budgets of those who worked in the wage economy. This was especially important for rafters, who suffered from higher risk of early death, and for whom kinsmen could represent a sort of insurance. A *qingbai* document records that a woman named Tang Ying, was married to a rafter named Jiang Keke. Jiang Keke died in 1822 when he struck some rocks on the Qingshui river while piloting a raft. In 1827, Tang Ying committed suicide, for reasons unsaid. While they had a son, Jiang Sanqi, who helped with the burial costs, Sanqi's uncle Jiang Kaiming was assigned to assist him, and helped with the preparation of textiles, rites, and a coffin. Together they contributed 50 taels, in order to “add to”

²⁹⁵ “Ti wei huishen Guizhou Liping fu min Zhou Laonen yin ju jia yun lin jiaojia xiangzheng shangque fu Wang Laowei shensi yi an yi lü ni zhe jian hou shi 题为会审贵州黎平府民周老嫩因拒加运森脚价相争压伤岳父汪老威身死一案依律拟斩监候事,” 1783, 02-01-007-023598-0014, FHA.

²⁹⁶ WMZY, 8183.

the ritual prayers for the soul (*jiazeng zhuijian* 加增追荐).²⁹⁷ Perhaps there were extraordinary circumstances behind the burial—a special need to pacify the soul that the kinsmen were willing to contribute to, or considerable wealth from one of the related parties that could be drawn upon. But this does not take away from the extraordinary expense for an important lifecycle ritual, that could not be accounted for with rafting wages alone.

Below the rafters, it was also difficult to find people who both identified themselves as forest tenants and happened to have their belongings inventoried, or some description of their daily consumption habits described in a concrete fashion. As mentioned before, part of the issue is that forest tenancy was a common sideline, along with timber pulling overland, and people may have had other occupational identities that took priority. One can get at least some sense of what such poorer wage workers consumed in general through an observation of what their contemporaries thought people at the bottom of society should *not* have had access to. A man who murdered a child in 1762 to steal her silver earrings in Pingjiang zhai was caught by the child's parents because he was carrying with him on the road a large quantity of goods that they thought impossible for a poor man to obtain in great quantities so easily: Salt, tobacco, and mats. The man, Shi Laojin, in his deposition, stated that the proceeds were used to pay back a debt, and purchase ten mats, two jin of tobacco leaves, twenty jin of salt, one zhang and four chi of white cloth, one bolt (*pi*) of hemp cloth, an umbrella, two jin of tea oil, one and a half jin of fine sugar, and a tobacco pipe (*yandai*).²⁹⁸

A rare case that I stumbled upon in the *xingke tiben* archives gives at least a rudimentary sketch of what their daily lives were like. The case involves a long-term forest tenant named

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ “Ti wei hui shen Guizhou Liping fu min Shi Laojin tu cai mou sha Pan Laozhang you nü Lao Wai yi an yi lü ni zhan li jue qing zhi shi 题为会审贵州黎平府民石老今图财谋杀潘老章幼女老歪一案依律拟斩立决请旨事,” 1762, 02-01-007-019613-0005, FHA.

Yang Youneng, who leased the land from a salt merchant from Tiantang *zhai*. He was described as living in a shack built on a slope two *li* behind the village. The roof was made of thatched grass. It had two rooms, one a stove room or kitchen, the other a sleeping room. The shack had no sheds or cabinets (indicating the runners expected one, perhaps to store contracts and savings), and may have been stripped clean, with only a straw mat and torn beddings left behind. The back of the shack had a pigsty. Unlike those who were named as Hunan migrants, however, Yang had a son. The son, Yang Laozu, was unfortunately killed by the burglars who broke into their shack that winter.²⁹⁹

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter shows that the timber industry indeed provided a major source of cash income through both piecemeal and seasonal employment for individuals residing along the littoral areas of the Qingshui and Yuan river basins, as well as mobile laborers beyond this region. The silver that flowed into the timber brokerages in Guazhi, Maoping, and Wangzhai did not accrue only in the hands of brokers and traders. As timber rafts flowed downstream, silver also flowed upstream into the hands of wage workers of all kinds: Timber pullers, timber rafters, forest tenants, and craftsmen. Among these flows, to the best of our reckoning, the transportation of timber over both water and land was the largest and most important, while tenancies and crafts also provided streams for outsiders and the landless poor to draw upon. The size and importance of transportation labor to people across the region was reflected in the bitter, sometimes violent conflicts over rafting.

A countercurrent amidst conflict over work and subsistence in the Qingshui river basin from the eighteenth century onwards which we have scarcely touched upon now was cooperation

²⁹⁹ “Ti wei shenli Liping fu min Peng Lao’er deng jiu qie xing qiang ju bi shi zhu Yang Laozu yi an yi lu fenbie ding ni qing zhi shi 题为审理黎平府民彭老二等纠窃行强拒毙事主杨老租一案依律分别定拟请旨事,” 1852, 02-01-007-033070-0003, FHA.

within the framework of different institutions such as the clan, the village, or the *kuan*. Conflicts over work and resources at the expense of merchants and traders were not the sole occupation of those involved in village and regional politics.

The *kuan* village leagues, and village elites more generally, were vehicles for coordinating the construction and upkeep of public works. Among the projects they were involved with in villages across Jinping, Liping and Jingzhou were the construction of bridges and roads, as well as structures that had a social or ritual importance like drum towers and temples. The florid, often self-congratulatory writing in these commemorative steles do not leave a lot of social or economic information. However, some steles do state the practical importance of these works for local transportation. An 1820 stele in Sanjiang, present day Jinping, states that the nearby area was an important passageway, however the pathways along the riverbank were steep and filled with ditches and shoals. A local gentryman for travelers between Hunan and Guizhou, “with the ease of people’s movement in his thoughts,” commissioned a group of workers and craftsmen to build passageways and a stone bridge.³⁰⁰

These institutions also helped protect subsistence in limited ways. Public material welfare in the Qing immediately evokes its granary system, helping smoothen the price of rice through the vagaries of the harvests. At the village level, on the other hand, some documents give us clues on how local institutions helped manage grain for public welfare. Villages may, for example, restrict markets for rice and paddy land from concerns about possible grain shortages. An agreement between different lineages in Wendou hamlet from 1838 states that all rice harvests were to be retained within the village, and may even have means to store grain to regulate the market through purchases and sales, though it is unclear from the text. “Those who sell paddy land out of our hamlet are very numerous, and those who sell grain upon our hamlet

³⁰⁰ SSLS, 96.

increase daily. [We] publicly deliberated that harvests must all be retained within the hamlet... Hereafter [we shall], in accordance with the increase or decrease of market prices, make purchases and sales [of rice].”³⁰¹ Other villages appear to have also had granaries of some form that were bought and sold as private property, though we cannot know directly from the contracts if they operated with a public function like in Wendou.³⁰²

These sources show that alongside conflicts that sought to win for villagers more work, there was also an emergent public spiritedness among village elites, who remained embedded in the local social fabric. This was a modest consolation prize for those who lost out in the process of social and economic differentiation, and by the volume of records on minor improvements, or structures that did not contribute directly to the subsistence of poorer villagers, these might be better understood as buttresses to village elite legitimacy in a time of change.

Work and material welfare cannot be the only elements of a stable order however. As we have seen, changes in the economic and political environment can ignite new conflicts in the region. So can the rise of individuals animated by non-material forces like religion, or the passing of great figures whose social bonds kept otherwise disparate groups together. These elements gathered forebodingly in the decades that followed the golden age of the timber trade, marked simultaneously by a slow, painful decline in trading volumes, and a broader economic depression. To retain order, villages had to turn to coercion and violence, through institutions like the *kuan*, *baojia*, and *tuanlian*. We turn to these in the next chapter.

³⁰¹ BZR, F0044.

³⁰² QSJWS 6-1-1-0017; 1-1-2-063.

CHAPTER 5: POLICING THE MIAO FRONTIER: GENTRY MILITIA AND THE RE-CONSTITUTION OF ORDER FROM THE LATE QING TO THE REPUBLIC

Introduction

In Philip Kuhn's *Rebellion and its Enemies*, we catch a glimpse of the brewing chaos in southeastern Guizhou through the eyes of Hu Linyi, who moved through several jurisdiction in Guizhou from 1847 to 1853, and whose attempts to reform local military and fiscal administration were influential in the late Qing.³⁰³ Hu was cognizant of the difficult situation faced by officials who held posts in places like Liping, Anshun, and Zhenyuan prefectures. These prefectural seats were lonely islands in a sea of villages over which the magistrate had very little practical control. Villages, if they were not already dominated by career bandits (as Hu found out in surveys of his own), tended to close up and remain detached from official control. Military solutions to putting wayward villages under control were worse than useless. Green Banner troops only capable of holding onto stationary posts. Making them go after bandits and rebels was like "[using] cows to catch rats," and they tended only to foster resentment among the locals.³⁰⁴ As Kuhn rightly points out, the core of Hu's eventual solution to the problem of rural control was to delegate authority by co-opting local elites, and handing to them police and military authority through *baojia* and *tuanlian*.³⁰⁵

In his case study on a tax-resistance rebellion in Weng'an, 70 miles from Liping prefecture's seat, however, Kuhn was puzzled by the "multiplex associations" called *langyue* (郎約) encountered by Hu, which were described in his sources as village leagues organized for the

³⁰³ For introductory accounts of Hu in the English language literature, see William T. Rowe, Hu Lin-i's Reform of the Grain Tribute System in Hupeh, 1855-1858," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 4.1 (December 1983): 33-86; Kwang-ching Liu, "The Ch'ing Restoration," in John Fairbank ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume X, Part I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 409-490.

³⁰⁴ Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*, 119.

³⁰⁵ Kuhn, *Rebellion*, 121-122.

purpose of self-defense, and acted without regard to Qing law and procedure in adjudicating cases, to the extent of executing criminals on their own. The etymology and meaning of the term *langyue*, in the first place, was unclear to him. He speculates that it might be related to the *xiangyue* post, or that it originated in the Miao language. They were said to have existed since the Daoguang reign to defend against growing disorder, with magistrates allowing them to go on, as they did not cover a large portion of the district. The aftermath of their defeat following a period of rebellion showed the extraordinary extent to which Hu Linyi was willing to take his strategy of local co-optation and delegation. The Weng'an *langyue*, despite having just broken out in rebellion, was tasked with administering *baojia* and *tuanlian* in combination. The magistrate's control was limited to the selection of the new *bao-tuan* heads, whose reliability rested on the ability of the magistrate to identify the right men, often literati with good moral character. This, Kuhn argued, was a reflection of the magistrate's limited powers in the broader context of rural overpopulation and economic competition, as well as Hu's own Confucian ideological bent, putting faith in the bond between ruler and ruled rather than in institutional strictures.³⁰⁶

The devolution of the Qing state's powers to local elites, from adjudication, to violence, and taxation along the lines set down by Kuhn and its role in the decline of the dynastic system has by now become received wisdom in the field. Syntheses have rejected framing the Qing's devolution of power within the paradigm of dynastic decline, which favors cyclical explanatory factors like the loosening of central control, growing corruption, and weaker emperors.³⁰⁷

Instead, they look to longer-term changes in demography, competition for economic resources,

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 127-133.

³⁰⁷ See Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army: A Study in Nineteenth Century Chinese Regionalism*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964) for an example of the cyclical decline paradigm.

and a bureaucratic state that failed to change enough to meet these new challenges. These were ultimately linked to the continued weakness of the Chinese state after the fall of the Qing, with regional warlords exercising loose control over their rural populations.³⁰⁸ Subsequent studies focused on specific cases have added much nuance to the overarching theme of devolution. Studies of militia in Hunan and Zhejiang for example have shown that militarization of local society was more ad hoc than persistent, and that later governments put more effort into exercising more control over local militias than the Qing did in its mid-century crises.³⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the devolution of the Qing state's powers to local actors has overall remained the dominant paradigm, and continues to play a major role in explaining the decline and collapse of the imperial state in more recent syntheses.³¹⁰

In this paper, I will be taking a different approach in re-assessing the historical changes that occurred over the course of the late-Qing and the early Republic, from the mid-century rebellions onwards. This period of devolving state powers to local gentry (and more broadly to local and provincial officials) is often portrayed as the beginning of an arc of the central state's dissolution, which then becomes sets up the narrative for the political struggles of the 20th century to reconstitute the state—a maneuver that makes sense teleologically, looking back from the chaos of the Warlord era, the eventual failure of the Republic of China, the later the success of the Communist Party. I will argue here that looking from the 1700s forwards—and taking seriously

³⁰⁸ Susan Mann Jones, and Philip A. Kuhn. "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion," in John K. Fairbank ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 10, Part I, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 107–162; Frederic Wakeman, *Fall Of Imperial China*, (Simon and Schuster, 1977); Diana Lary, "Warlord Studies," *Modern China* 6.4 (1980): 439-470.

³⁰⁹ Edward A. McCord, "Local Militia And State Power In Nationalist China," *Modern China* 25.2 (1999): 115-141; Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

³¹⁰ William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Klaus Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

the idea that “irregular” actors who were not completely bureaucratized, in the sense that they have a specific, delimited sphere of action, acted on the basis of general rules, and whose personnel are thus fungible and impersonal have a role to play in state formation—that late Qing and early Republic was a period in which the central state developed more formal and direct links to the village in southeastern Guizhou, and served to pull it closer into fuller territorial and political incorporation.³¹¹

In contrast with previous chapters, we can observe from sources in this period that the practice of communication and coordination between local magistrates and village heads had become a regular phenomenon. Simultaneously, as these links formed, local landholding elites were weakened, and as we will see in the following chapter, localist monopolies were loosened or abolished. People and capital became increasingly mobile. These conditions opened a window for the undoing of the existing socio-ecological order based on lineage elites who grew, sold and traded timber. Banditry, and crime more generally, plagued the region after the rebellion, reflecting the strains on southeastern Guizhou’s social fabric, just as the local magistrate is able to reach more deeply into the countryside. The contradictory motions between integration into the central state and the straining of the existing social and environmental order, I will also argue, was characteristic of the period from the late Qing to the PRC for southeastern Guizhou.

The main primary source base that I will use to study these new linkages between the central state and the indigenous political organizations of Guizhou is a unique collection of more than four hundred documents on the career of Liu Kaihou, a *baojia* and *tuanlian* head for Jiuzhai, composed of mostly Dong villages in present-day Jinping county. These are the largest collections on *baojia* and *tuanlian* management in the Qingshui river area, and allow us a view

³¹¹ Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660-1815*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1-2.

of *baojia-tuanlian* from the bottom up—an approach that to my knowledge has yet to be done in the English-language literature. They cover a period from the first half of the 1800s, when we see the first direct documented communications between officials and local institutions, down to the 1910s, after which there is no more documentation. In few other sources can we see with the same granularity the burgeoning sinews between state and indigene for the Miao and the Dong in the Qing.³¹²

This chapter will begin with a description of local conditions and the early documented communications between the Qing and indigenous village leaders. Following this, I will revisit and re-contextualize the documents from Hu Linyi's tenure through several prefectures in Guizhou. The core of the chapter will be on the fundamental problems of social disorder addressed by the reorganization of local society based on the combined institution of *baojia-tuanlian*. This will cover cases of property damage, property theft, and different forms of interpersonal violence in the last half of the 1800s.

Early Links between State and Indigene in Jiuzhai

Jiuzhai (九寨) refers to the nine Dong hamlets (*zhai*) of Yandong, Yaobai, Huangmen, Shiyin, Gaopei, Pisuo, Pingqiu, Kuidan, and Xiaojiang. Wangzhai, or the present day Jinping county seat, is sometimes included within this grouping, which became the basis of an administrative sub-unit in the Republic, called the *Sanjiang Jiuzhai Tuanfang zongju Jiuzhai Tuanfang Fenju*. Jiuzhai is located in the Xiao river (*Xiaojiang*) tributary to the Qingshui river, which spurs north away from the Qingshui river in Jinping county seat, and ends in Zhenyuan, serving as an geographic, social, and economic periphery for the monopoly hamlets, principally Wangzhai. They were primarily inhabited by speakers of the Northern Dong dialect and

³¹² Long Zejiang, *Jiuzhai Dongzu baojia tuanlian dang'an* 九寨侗族保甲团练档案, (Guiyang: Guizhou daxue chubanshe, 2016), hereafter JZDB.

traditionally ruled through the *kuan* system. Like much of southeastern Guizhou, mountains dominate the landscape, though to a greater extent than elsewhere. The high elevation has obtained the alternative name for the area of “Gaopo” (高坡), and unlike the better connected littoral hamlets, post-liberation ethnographers found that Jiuzhai had a much lower concentration of forest property in the hands of landlords, with those placed under this social class owning only 27.1% of *shanlin* (mountain forest) properties, a reflection of its lower level of commercialization relative to other places in the region.³¹³ The previous villages we encountered like Wendou and Yaoguang hamlets, in contrast, were listed as having 94% and 60.3% landlord ownership of *shanlin* respectively.³¹⁴

The Qing state, as we have seen in previous chapters, already had precursor links to indigenous villages before the implementation of institutions like *baojia* and *tuanlian*. These include indirect links through the native chieftaincies, and more direct links through tax payments and acceptance of jurisdiction in legal cases and dispute resolution, such as those between Wendou hamlet and Liping prefecture. *Xiangyue* or village compact leaders, who were tasked with the moral education of their charges, like *baojia* headmen, were supposed to have been appointed, but the seriousness of implementation for tasks like carrying out lectures on the sacred edicts is unclear.³¹⁵

The earliest communication from the Qing state to village representatives preserved in the Jiuzhai *baojia* collection dates to 1831. This document was a proclamation (*gaoshi*) issued by the magistrate of Jinping county, Liping prefecture. The magistrate was responding to petitions made directly by subjects from Pingqiu hamlet, the largest of the Jiuzhai hamlets, requesting that he stamp out the disorderly activities by “useless wanderers” (*wulai guntu*) in the local marketplace.

³¹³ DSLD, 19.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ See for example YZWS 280-281.

Such direct petitions and communications between a new class of literate indigenous subjects and the local magistrates, as discussed in Chapter 3, were by then a regular feature of Qing administration in the Miao frontier. Orders sent out in return, including in this document, were still addressed to indigenous village leaders, in this case to the *zhaitou* of Pingqiu hamlet and its managers (*jingji ren*).³¹⁶

Establishing Baojia and Tuanlian

The impetus towards formal and sustained integration between state and village was the combination of multiple uprisings beginning in the 1850s, and the actions of Hu Linyi from 1849-1851, when Hu served as Zhenyuan and Liping prefect, the same posts that the “Miao hands” Fang Xian and Zhang Guangsi held over a hundred years before. Hu Linyi found these administrative jurisdictions as we would have expected them to appear after the partial integration of southeastern Guizhou in the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns. Prefects were responsible for handling cases and maintaining order over these jurisdictions, but reality was far more confusing, with a patchwork of areas that were too distant for effective administration and customary rule. Hu discussed this problem in an essay on the so-called *chahua di* of Guizhou, referring to places that are only nominally in the jurisdiction of a certain administrative unit.³¹⁷ Many hamlets were also thought to be bandit hideouts that were outright hostile to the Qing, which was not held in high regard from a long history of extorting subjects. Some of these hamlets in his reckoning were almost completely inhabited by bandit households.³¹⁸ Sending *yamen* runners to similar villages to handle problems, or even troops if the problems turned kinetic, was thought to be a pointless exercise.³¹⁹ The vision Hu gives us of the prefectural power

³¹⁶ JZDB 64-65.

³¹⁷ “Lun Guizhou jing chahua qingxing qi,” HWZG, 2-8.

³¹⁸ “Shang qiao jian ji zhong cheng,” HWZG, 8-9.

³¹⁹ HWZG 20-21.

as it was at the time was one of large jurisdictional areas but very short effective range, severely hampered by a surrounding population with which it had no mechanisms for sustained cooperation outside of ad hoc appeals.

The solution that Hu Linyi eventually formulated in an order to Liping prefecture's village gentry was shaped by a long series of exchanges with other officials and frustrations with the practice of administration in Guizhou. Hu was not beyond eliminating bandits outright when they were found, but he often found that pursuit was not feasible. There was always the potential to chase too far, only for the bandits—who were recognized to have a distinct advantage in their knowledge of the terrain, especially over under-seasoned officials and troops—to “scurry” (*cuan*, hence the common “rat” metaphor) across borders into Guangxi or Hunan in the end.³²⁰ The run-of-the-mill braves used to man guard posts often proved inadequate, if they were even present on the job. Hence, despite the occasional hints of suspicion towards low-level literate and gentry in his writing, Hu became a fervent promoter of a decentralized model of military control, delegating *baojia* and *tuanlian* operations, funding and leadership to local elites supervised by magistrates.

Distinguishing himself from his predecessors, Hu pressed to make the pro forma *baojia* and *tuanlian* which previous Liping prefects had reported about a tangible reality, going to the hamlets in person in the autumn of 1851 to supervise their formation and hand-pick local elites to carry on their operations. Hu was intent on letting hamlet elites know that his was not the usual exhortation into the wind, and followed up repeatedly from his initial attempts to establish *baojia* and *tuanlian* in the post. He adapted in an iterative fashion, issuing measures to counteract the defects that surfaced as his ideals were put into practice.

³²⁰ HWZG, 12-16, 11.

The principles Hu embraced in implementing *baojia* and *tuanlian* over his tenure might be summarized into a few essential categories contained in one of the final documents Hu issued as Liping prefect, “An Order on Plans Regarding Baojia and Tuanlian (*shen yu baojia tuanlian zhangcheng*).”³²¹ The core of Hu’s principles was the delegation of the powers of the state to local elites - the only people Hu thought to have the capacity and the motivation to maintain order. Delegation of powers is far from new in Qing administration, but Hu’s innovation was seen in his willingness to explicitly break with longstanding administrative customs, and replace them with new ones. One of these customs that Hu broke, as Kuhn has noted before, was the assignment of *tuanlian* and *baojia* responsibilities to “non-entities” in local society, which previously allowed the central state to maintain a buffer against the dominance of lineages and other elite organizations at the village level. Contrary to this custom, Hu permitted the combination of both *tuanlian* and *baojia* powers to be put in the hands of local elites, often in the same person, hence the combined appellations like *bao-tuan*. Official oversight was limited to appointments and reporting.³²²

Increased demands for a greater number of more detailed reports from village leaders who were appointed to *bao-tuan* posts was a major counterweight to the expanded delegation of powers. Hu was meticulous in conceptualizing what reports were to be furnished and what their contents should be, aiming to close the information gap that made it so easy for both serious enemies of the state and simple bandits to disappear into the forests and hamlets. He demanded reconnaissance of important chokepoints with accurate directions based on compasses, together with annotated maps.³²³ Every hamlet was to submit *hukou* records, with one copy stored in the hamlet itself, to be updated regularly for subtractions and additions. These demands for *hukou*

³²¹ HWZG 85-87.

³²² Kuhn, 117-122.

³²³ HWZG, 12-16.

records applied to all hamlets, large or small. Highland peasants and gamblers were singled out as populations that were to be checked one by one.³²⁴ Though orders from later in the century suggest that the strict documentary requirements of the crisis during Hu's tenure were loosening, and that certain classes of reports like granary holdings were continuously lacking, enough was done in Hu's time that they were able to proudly proclaim that the "hukou numbers [of the Miao], and the key passes [now] can all be examined according to records."³²⁵ Combined with a strategy of small guard posts spread out across important passages, the Qing, if circumstances demanded, could now at least conceive of exercising granular control over the movement of people in this territory.

Hu planned to develop the internal capacities of local institutions. He worked to improve their capacity to collect funds, and to cooperate laterally with other local organizations. Hu singled out the *kuanyue* as a laggard by these measures because of its character as an ad hoc, temporary measure, and its resistance to Hu's requests that they set up a permanent fund to draw upon in emergencies and regularize collections from member households. Hu wanted militias trained regularly in specially designated grounds and paid rations to participate in the training. Lateral communications were to use "transmission slips" (*chuanqian* 傳籤). These can be used to call for aid from neighboring *bao-tuan*, part of a broader desire to consolidate neighboring militias that lasted beyond Hu's term in Liping.³²⁶

The Jiuzhai *bao-tuan* on which this chapter is based, for example, was ordered by the Liping prefect to merge with the better resourced Sanjiang militia whose core was in the timber trade monopoly hamlet of Wangzhai in 1883. The leaders of the Jiuzhai *bao-tuan* resisted this attempt to consolidate the two in a letter to the magistrate on the grounds of geographic

³²⁴ HWZG, 85-87.

³²⁵ HWZG, 22.

³²⁶ HWZG, 85-87.

separation and the absence of “social feeling” between the two areas. Ultimately their request was rejected, and the Jiuzhai *bao-tuan* was put under the command of the Wangzhai *bao-tuan*.³²⁷ In these ways, magistrates sought to make the *bao-tuan* into a sustainably funded trans-local unit that overcame the fragmentation of the area and was in theory better capable of responding to mobile bandits and rebels who paid no respect to jurisdictional boundaries.

The implementation of *baojia* and *tuanlian* according to these principles by an energetic magistrate committed to reforming local administrative practice was an advance in the formal integration of the Qing with the villages and indigenous compact societies of southeastern Guizhou. The powers of *tuanlian*, *baojia*, and the *kuan* were now married in the same institution, and often in the same persons, whose positions, and whose loyalties were owed to local magistrates. This is a contrast to the more indirect and ambiguous system that came before, of irregular and informal contact with indigenous leaders, and formal contacts with indirect rulers through the native chieftains.

A Trial by Fire: The Miao Rebellion in Southeastern Guizhou

The new system set up by Hu Linyi in Liping prefecture was put to the test soon after its establishment. In the spring of 1854, uprisings began in Dushan, deeper inland from Liping, and in the heart of Black Miao territory. Uprisings erupted closer to the lower Qingshui over the years. By the summer of 1855, uprisings were reported in Taigong, upstream of the Qingshui river from the *sanjiang* brokerages and Jianhe, reportedly due to the cessation of the timber trade. Jiang Yingfang—a “bare stick” with no surviving family who roamed downstream into Hunan, established a branch of the Heaven and Earth Society (*tiandihui*) in Tianzhu, and eventually posed the greatest military threat in the southeastern Guizhou theater of the rebellion together with Zhang Xiumei—began an uprising of his own in October 1857, and bringing war

³²⁷ JZDB 5-6.

into the lower Qingshui basin, testing the organizational powers of indigenous elites, and the strength of their links to the Qing.

The course of the rebellion in southeastern Guizhou is well documented in state sources, and has been the subject of a prior study. Here, as befitting a study that focuses on the local implications of the rebellion, I will turn to other sources that have yet to be used in the English language literature: Accounts written by indigenous elites of the mid-century rebellion. These are the *The Records of the Sanying Militia* (*sanyingji* 三营记), written by Jiang Haiwen, a resident of Wendou hamlet, and *A Brief Account of the Generations* [*shixi jilue* 世系纪略], a section from the fragmentary remains of the Wendou Jiang lineage genealogy, written by Jiang Zuoqing in 1876. As in previous chapters, these will be combined with steles and contracts. Together, they provide some of the only detailed records of the rebellion from an indigenous perspective, and update the findings in the Anglophone literature on the subject since the publication of Robert Jenks' monograph.³²⁸ These sources provide a fuller chronology of events, centered on the progress of the war in the Qingshui river basin, and different narratives of the rebellion's nature and impact. It is to this history that we turn to in this subsection.

The local militias were built on a history of vertical cooperation with magistrates long preceding Hu Linyi's term, though the connection with past military action can be vague. The writer of *sanyingji* linked the institutions of his time to precursors going as far back as the Ming. More concrete links are written about from the time of the Qianlong-era suppression of rebels onwards. At this time, Jiang Fuhai of Yaoguang was said to have helped imperial troops as a wayfinder, in exchange for which he was awarded the title of Nanmeng native chieftain, which

³²⁸ See Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'an guan, *Qingdai qianqi Miaomin qiyi dang'an shiliao huibian* 清代前期苗民起义档案史料汇编, (Beijing : Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1987).

was retired upon his death in 1751.³²⁹ A long period of peace and *sanying* inactivity followed, until the 1830s when bandits from across the border in Huguang, among them a group called the “Grasstop Flyers (*caoshangfei*)” harassed and occupied hamlets in Guizhou. Nothing was done until leaders from multiple hamlets petitioned for permission to institute a temporary tax on the timber trade and lawfully kill bandits on the spot. This petition was granted by the magistrate.

Horizontal inter-village and inter-ethnic coordination was built on multi-village leagues like the *kuan*. This is how a Miao village like Wendou could pool resources and join maneuvers with other non-Miao villages. See for example an undated stele in Wendou which states that “for matters that should be handled, without regard for its ease or difficulty, or its being within the *kuan*, the militia heads and gentry folk of each hamlet must join forces and attend to each other’s affairs to death.”³³⁰ Addressing a rise in banditry, a petition copied onto an undated stele (likely from the early years of the Guangxu reign) states that “ [the hamlet leaders] gathered a meeting in a public place in Wendou, re-organizing the militia regulations (*tuangui* 团规) and the *kuan* prohibitions (*kuanjin* 款禁), with Jiang [text unclear] as *zongli*.”³³¹ This document addresses the late-Qing reconstitution of militia in response to banditry, and as in other documents, the leadership and organization of both *kuan* and the militia was collapsed into one person and institution. Locals were unlikely to have made hard distinctions between militia and *kuan*, and casually mixed terminology referring to one or the other.

Still, Hu Linyi’s tenure established two major changes from the prevailing, hands-off relationship between magistrate and village. Selection and appointment of baojia-tuanlian heads came under the magistrate’s control. Hu Linyi visited the most important *sanying* villages of Wendou and Yaoguang, villages he called the “doorway” to Liping. From these villages, he

³²⁹ JPXZ 1546; *Yaoguang zhi*, 197.

³³⁰ Xu, *Kuanyuefa*, 242.

³³¹ YZF, 173-175.

chose men educated in the imperial education system into leadership positions: the *juren* graduate Jiang Jiduan and the military licentiate Jiang Hanying. Jiang Jiduan was an extraordinarily rare figure, a provincial examination graduate from the class of 1846 who served as district magistrate in Sichuan, but had since failed to find an appointment and returned to Yaoguang hamlet. It was he who was appointed the commander of the *sanying* Upper Garrison (*shangying* 上營), a subunit within the larger three-garrison force that encompassed the ten hamlets of Yaoguang, Shao'ai, Tangdong, Geweng, Jingzong, Miaohou, Peiliang, Gantang. Jiang Hanying led the Middle Garrison (*zhongying* 中營), covering Wendou, Ping'ao, Yanwan, Jiashe, Zhongyang, Zhanghua, Jiuyou, Nannu, Jiuhuai, Diuxi, Songli tuanding.³³² The Lower Garrison (*xiaying*) was led by the military licentiate Yao Tingzhen, son of Yao "millions," who we encountered in the third chapter. This garrison covered the hamlets Xinzhai, Yanzhai Zhaicao, Badong, Cenwu, Gaochang, Gaozhen, Guigu, and Daping. Meritorious service in these positions was rewarded with ceremonial insignia. Jiang Hanying of Wendou and Jiang Jiduan were both awarded hat buttons with blue plumes of the fifth rank (五品藍翎頂戴).³³³

The militia were delegated powers to extract taxes and conscript men. Remittances of paddy rice harvests were taken by the militia in the name of the Qing, and men were drafted at a rate of one for every ten households.³³⁴ There are no numbers that can give us a sense of how much tax collections contributed to militia funding as a proportion of the total, but some part of the total was derived from direct contributions by the leading families of the hamlets, and they claim that they bore very heavy burdens to support the war. The writers of *shixi jilüe* suggest that this was done with some reluctance. They state that "in the beginning, all that I have done was serve as the village head (*xiangzheng*), but later I was ordered to serve as militia commanders

³³² JPXZ, 1546.

³³³ JPXZ, 1549, 1380-1381.

³³⁴ JPXZ, 1546.

[*zhachong zongli*], [providing] troop grains and rations, taking care of the family and the militia, respectfully protecting the lives of the locale, [and for this, I was] willing to provide my ancestor's patrimony."³³⁵ The writers of both these sources were keen to underline the weight of their contributions and that taxes collected during the campaign were willingly given, hinting at tension vis-a-vis the Qing government or with holders of property over the matter. Tension with the former—the Liping magistrate—over militia taxes certainly became a contentious matter in the post-war period, as we will see later in the case of *sanying* commander Jiang Dengpan's arrest.

The militia also became the vehicle for Qing officials to implement non-military policies. One example of this in southeastern Guizhou was its use for the promotion of forestry. A dated to 1851 states that the *sanying* militia received orders from the provincial governor to promote the replanting of trees through the establishment of tree planting bureaus and sub-bureaus (*zhongshu zongju/fenju*), at a density of four villages for every sub-bureau. The rationale for relying on the militia was that Liping prefecture had a very large land area, making it impractical to operate using a centralized system. In their words, “only the *xiangtuan* establishing sub-bureaus [can] handle matters,” a sentiment that can also be applied to the handling of military and legal matters. Households were required to submit records of property boundaries and plant trees. Rewards and punishments were set. Encouragement was given to locals to rent to *kehu* (guest persons) who were unable to purchase land for forest planting.³³⁶ The use of the militia as an institution for executing economic policy may have also extended to the promotion of an additional spring cropping season for planting non-glutinous rice, championed by Hu Linyi, but whose implementers were left unmentioned.³³⁷ Thus, by necessity, the militia became the principal channel for transmitting the will of magistrates to society at the village level.

³³⁵ “Shixi jilüe,” *Jiangshi zupu* [The Jiang Lineage Genealogy], hereafter JSZP.

³³⁶ JPXZ, 1558-1559.

³³⁷ LPFZ, 3a:1b-2b.

The early actions of Hu Linyi's reconstituted village militia were defensive, and did not involve direct combat. Prior calls to arms from border disturbances by the bandit Li Yuanfei, and from uprisings in Gao'e and Jiusong hamlets started the process of mobilizing the *sanying* through the preparation of men and weapons. The militia also set up defenses of bridges, but did not result in combat. The first taste of combat came on the eighth day of the tenth lunar month of 1856. The *sanying* leaders, aware that rebels were moving towards their territory, met in Podong, the heart of the Nanlian-Podong *kuanyue* league, in the previous month for discussions and elected their leaders. An initial skirmish in Podong on that day resulted in ten dead. A larger battle ten days later resulted in another dominant victory for the *sanying*. The rebels, who were routed and fled in disorder, lost 400 men and firearms. The *sanying* force of 3000 men saw only 30 casualties. Bloody, victorious routs were commonly reported in the *sanyingji*, with rebels retreating in poor order, corpses strewn across blood forming gullies in the battlefields.³³⁸

The main achievement of the *sanying* militia was its repeated success in relieving assaults and sieges on the administrative capitals, and in fending off the numerous raids that constituted the main offensive actions of rebel bands. The *sanying* militia served as a mobile and rapid response force that could be called upon by the magistrate in combination with Qing and other troops. In a relief of Liping's prefectural seat in 1868, for example, *sanying* troops responded to a request for aid within two days of receiving them. They proved capable of taking on both scattered bandit groups, and more organized rebel armies like those of Zhang Xiumei's. A passage from *sanyingji* illustrates one of their encounters with Zhang Xiumei's rebel army, which ended in a route in favor of the *sanying* militia:

“The central militia (*zhongying*) used fowling cannons on the right bank of the river to continuously attack the bandits. The deaths were innumerable. The bandits could not stand

³³⁸ JPXZ, 1550.

their ground, and retreated to the streams inland [away from the coastal areas where they were exposed to cannonfire]. They carried timber down the river, turned them into rafts, and in the middle of night, in Bantangdong (at the foothills of Ping'ao hamlet) Jiafu bridge, they crossed the river. The Ping'ao militia used the cannons to hit and disperse them, and after, the Upper Militia's Tangdong battalion continued to bring fire and came, continuously releasing gunfire. Many of the bandits were injured or dead...Until the daylight returned to the sky, militia troops navigated the river to pursue and kill the bandits..."³³⁹

This passage shows us the elements of what made the *sanying* an effective military force. They had superior arms, held advantageous positions, were able to coordinate movements with other forces in a timely fashion, and could move through the terrain in speed. Of the gentry-led militia that were put together in this time, the *sanying* were a major success story, surviving their trial by fire, and vindicating Hu's vision of relying on village elites for militia organization.

Jiuzhai's defense against rebel forces in the Xian-Tong period by contrast saw much less success. Like other places in Liping, the Jiuzhai were ordered to mobilize a militia, in their case through a *kuan* alliance (*kuanlian*). They did well when they met with the troops of Jiang Yingfang, coming from the eastward direction in Hunan. As we will see, the Jiuzhai crumpled with Jiang's attack on defensive posts in Yandong. Jiuzhai was then occupied by Jiang's army, and used as a base from which to get supplies of grain and make raids across the rest of the region.³⁴⁰ We do not have an account of the war from the *baojia-tuanlian* archives of Liu Kaihou. However, we do have a commemorative stele carved in 1876 that recounts the general progress

³³⁹ JPXZ, 1554.

³⁴⁰ *Kuidan cunzhi*, 285-294. See also Zhu, *Yimin shichang*, 52, 72-74.

of the war from the eyes of the elites in Yandong village - one of Jiuzhai's nine component villages.

In their account, the troubles began in the years 1854 and 1855, with minor disturbances in the area's peripheries. A notable distinction in this account is that the writers of the account set off their identity from the rebels in ethnic terms. The rebel-bandits were given dehumanizing descriptions, with "dog-like and sheep-like Miao natures." The Yandong villagers were elevated to a higher place within their imagined ethnic hierarchy. Despite participating in the *kuan* tradition, and being part of the northern Dong dialect and cultural area, they placed themselves as ethnically adjacent to the Han, that the village was inhabited by people who were not among the rebellious Miao, but people who "resembled Han Chinese [*xianglei Hanren* 相类汉人]." ³⁴¹

Just like other village settlements in Liping prefecture, Yandong was ordered to form a militia from the *kuan* by the prefect in this time: "...The Liping prefect Duo ordered our village's [Yandong's] Luo Xingming to serve as *xiangzheng* 乡正, and lead the combination of the Jiuzhai [of the nine hamlets] into a singular *kuan* [*changlian Jiuzhai he wei yi kuan* 倡连九寨合为一款]." ³⁴² Villages conscripted a measly fifteen braves each (making for a total of 135 for the whole *kuan*). Households were appointed to strategic outposts: "[It was] publicly deliberated, that the chief of the guardpost Yang Jiyao is to move his household and put together a shack to defend Liyuan pass, the guardpost is to be named Niandong *ka* [...*gong yi kashou Yang Jiyao diao hu bian peng fangdu Liyuan da'ao ka ming hu wei Niandong ka* ...公议卡首杨积瑶调户编棚防堵犁元大凹卡名呼为念洞卡]." From this passage we can obtain the following from the organization of the *kuan* and militia within the Jiuzhai: The Liping magistrate had direct communications and powers of appointment over the village chiefs, who mediated between the

³⁴¹ SSLS, 110.

³⁴² Ibid.

prefecture and the *kuan*, which it helped organize, and within which it commissioned people to specific tasks, such as chief of a guardpost. Funding was taken mainly from the wealthy villagers, described using the stock phrase for militia organization at the time of how “the poor contributed labor, the rich contributed money [*pinzhe chu li, fuzhe chu zi* 贫者出力, 富者出资].”³⁴³

When the Jiuzhai *kuan* militia was newly organized, it had few encounters, and only one serious engagement with rebel bands that lasted thirty days. In this engagement, the Jiuzhai militia succeeded. However it was utterly crushed thereafter, when it was hit by the larger and better organized forces under Jiang Yingfang. They conducted intermittent raids on settlements of Pingqiu (the largest and most important of the Jiuzhai) and Shiyin. The Jiuzhai militia was unable to adequately respond to these raids. It requested aid from the Liping prefect. However, the prefecture was too distant and cut-off from Jiuzhai. It also asked for the help of Yaoguang (and the *shangying* “upper” militia), which was positioned more closely. But they only “took care of themselves, and would not come out [*Miaoguang zi gu bu chu* 苗光自顾不出].”³⁴⁴

The Jiuzhai militia held out for nearly a month against Jiang Yingfang’s forces in the summer of 1862. However, they eventually ran out of supplies and munitions. The militia retreated, and were pursued by Jiang’s troops through Cendun, Daping, and Zhongyang. They eventually received military assistance by appealing with Tangdong village to the Liping prefect, and they recovered the villages by the autumn of that year. A new round of conscription yielded only sixty four braves (even less than their meager harvest of 1862).

A territorial recovery notwithstanding, the occupation of the Jiuzhai villages by Jiang Yingfang’s forces was damaging to the *kuan*’s already limited capacity to resist any further

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ SSLS, 110.

onslaught. Houses were burned down, and many people had died or had been weakened from lack of food and disease. A renewed attack came upon Yandong village in the summer of 1864, and they could mount only a feeble defense. The militia fled the village, which was burned down once more. The attack, which came on the precipice of the autumn harvest, created a simultaneous lack of food for the villagers. They appealed to the prefect, who sent an order to the Wendou militia to bring food aid, and take in the village's young and old as refugees, an order that was supposed to have been refused by Wendou, and was bitterly remembered by villagers. "Wendou had no heart to help, not giving a single grain. With nowhere to turn, we again fled to Cendun, surviving on thin soup."³⁴⁵ The remainder of the war was a repeat of this basic pattern. Rebel troops attacked the villages, and the militia found themselves unequal to the task. They retreated into friendly villages, requested aid, and eventually recovered the villages with the aid of superior forces, only to fall back once more.

The decade of intermittent warfare and destruction of physical capital was enervating to villages across the region. The Jiuzhai area, repeatedly occupied by Jiang Yingfang's troops, perhaps represents one end of the regional spectrum in terms of damage incurred over the years of war. We of course cannot reckon with any statistical certainty just how bad the damage was, but qualitatively, it seems the productive powers of villagers and the lands they cultivated stood at a fraction of pre-war conditions. So were stocks of assets held by households. The Yandong stele once again states:

"In a family of eight, not one person could cultivate; with eight *mu* of land, not one *mu* could be planted. Those who contributed effort spat out all their blood; those who

³⁴⁵ SSLS, 111.

contributed resources donated all their property; those who sacrificed for the country returned to the yellow earth.”³⁴⁶

The price of goods in the waning years of the war recorded in the stele suggests the same image of an economy sapped of power, unable to produce enough for its basic needs, and with the market unable to make up for shortages. In these final years, a bowl [*wan* 碗] of rice was said to have cost five *fen* of silver. Diets for laborers and militiamen were said to have been reduced to vegetable roots and thin gruel.³⁴⁷

On the other end, elites in Wendou were also weakened by this long stretch of violence. Productive agricultural lands were taxed heavily and damaged, while people did their best to rebuild: “Everybody set up paddy rice and mountain [plots], built homes, laboring their minds and bodies.”³⁴⁸ Still, much damage was already done. Jiang Jizhao of the Upper Militia anchored on Yaoguang hamlet—and member of what was likely the wealthiest of the lower Qingshui river lineages—sold off half of the family’s assets to fund the militias, and the lineage thereafter became a shadow of its former self, with descendants dispersing out of Yaoguang. The Upper Wendou Jiangs descending from Jiang Shichao fared better economically, but the Jiangs of Lower Wendou with whom they coordinated, and who held leadership in the militia in the Republic through Jiang Dengpan also sold off their assets and were a spent force when banditry arrived again in the 20th century.³⁴⁹ The *sanying* leaders, motivated by their hardship in the aftermath of the war, went to Guiyang in 1879 to petition the governor Cen Yuying for tax relief, which was approved.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ JSZP.

³⁴⁹ JPXZ 1321, 1337; *Yaoguang zhi*, 205.

³⁵⁰ JPXZ, 1555.

Though it is difficult to figure what its precise effect was, the loss of many lives, and in particular of important figures in the lineages who were crucial to maintaining bonds of social feeling within the clan only added to the physical damage of the wars. In 1862, Jiang Jiduan, the *juren* commander of the upper militia from Yaoguang, who had a successful year leading a thousand-man *kuan* army to assist the Gaoyang *kuan* on his way to Miaopo, died in a daring evening raid across the river under heavy fog by rebels in 1862. His last mention in the *sanyingji* before this was in the previous year, 1861, when he led a thousand-man *kuan* army, assisted by 200 musketeers (*chongshou* 銃手) from the Gaoyang *kuan* in a successful defense against rebels coming from the eastward direction in Hunan. This time, the *sanying* fell into retreat, and were only able to hold the line with a timely warning from the *dakuan* head.³⁵¹ The violence of this period moved the *sanying* leaders to write poems to capture their grief and loss—some of the rare instances of this genre of writing preserved from the time. Jiang Haiwen wrote about these feelings as they conducted ceremonies in the aftermath of the rebellion to commemorate the dead:

“...[We can now] only communicate through dreams, lamenting and sighing
 Gazing out at the water flowing east,
 Wondering of the many hardships, the many great deeds,
 Towering figures, majestic and strong, gather to mourn and lament,
 Their memories now but a distant echo, lost in the void.”³⁵²

The Unity of Kuanyue, Village, and Militia in Popular Documents and Practice

The previous two sections demonstrated that magistrates like Hu Linyi were cognizant of local institutions like the *kuan*, that they sought to mobilize these institutions through the

³⁵¹ JPXZ, 1551.

³⁵² JPXZ 1584.

organization of gentry-led militia, and that these hybrid institutions achieved varying levels of success in defending against different waves of rebellion that occurred over the course of the 1850s and 1860s. And while officials indicated in their own writings, and in the recounting of these events in the prefectural gazetteer that they were working through the *kuan*, we do not have the extraordinary sources that other scholars have found in other areas that directly show the appointment of *kuanshou* and the use of the *kuan* as a means to surveil the population and its landholdings within the village that permit a more direct equation between the *kuanyue* and the *tuanlian* militia.³⁵³ However, we do have scattered, unsystematic evidence from after the rebellion that allows us to make a link between the *kuanyue* and the *tuanlian* from the bottom-up, providing glimpses of how it operated in practice, and what its fate was after the mid-century emergencies that compelled their fusion.

Some of the evidence that allows us to make a link between the *kuan* and the militia comes from close reading of the texts, and recognizing the code-switching that the writers of these documents engaged in as they wrote about the *kuan* and the militia. That is, occasionally, it comes through in some documents that as writers grasped for the right terminology, they occasionally sought the word *kuan*, rather than *tuanlian*, in a searching pattern that occasionally comes through, even in the written text.³⁵⁴ The writers of these documents sought the word *kuan* because it did work for them, in much the same way that people reached for expressions between languages in certain contexts to express a more precise meaning. Some scholars have noted, for example, how indigenous language found its way into the documents through areas like place

³⁵³ Wu Juanting, “Ming Qing Xiangxinan Miaojiang de Lijia Fuyi Yu Shehui Zuzhi de Bianqian 明清湘西南苗疆的里甲赋役与社会组织变迁,” *Zhongguo Shehui Jingji Shi Yanjiu* (2024): 1–14.

³⁵⁴ Long Zejiang, “Qingdai Guizhou Qingshuijiang liuyu de baojia yu tuanlian: Jiuzhai Dongzu cunluo baojia tuanlian dang’an de wenxian jiazhi shidu 清代贵州清水江流域的保甲与团练: 九寨侗族村落保甲团练档案的文献价值释读,” *JZDB* 1-17.

names.³⁵⁵ Wu Juanting indeed was able to make the equation between the *li* and the *kuan* by making a move along similar lines, using ethnographic fieldwork to uncover the identity between the term *tang* (塘) and the *xiaokuan*.

The contexts in which confusions in terminology occurred in various documents, including vertical ones, from the magistrate to his subjects, suggest it was not a village monopoly. An order on prisoner transportation from the magistrate states:

“When transporting taxes or prisoners, laborers should be provided according to the pass cards for escort duties. When there are military troops (*yingbing* 营兵), militia (*chailian* 差练), or *kuan* (*kuanzhong* 款众) escorting captured bandits to government offices, even without labor cards, the local areas must provide laborers and able-bodied men as escorts without fail, but no provisions may be demanded. If those who have captured bandits attempt to demand laborers, upon verification, they shall be bound and sent [to authorities] for investigation.”³⁵⁶

Green standard troops, militia, and the *kuan* had functional overlaps that made it necessary for the magistrate to address them together. Mostly, however, the mentions of the *kuan* that could be recovered in documents from the 1800s have been in horizontal communications. In the collection of Liu Kaihou’s documents as *baojia-tuanlian* head, he is named as *kuan* chief (*kuanzhu* 款主) or one among the *kuan* chiefs not in communications between him and the magistrate, but in resolutions of disputes within the *kuan*. See this document, which recounts the attempt by a resident of Liu Kaihou’s home village, who was accused of stealing a cow, to appeal

³⁵⁵ See for example Wang Zongxun, “Qingshuijiang wenshu zhengli zhong de Miao Dong yu diming kaoshi chuyi 清水江文书整理中的苗侗语地名考释刍议,” *Yuanshengtai minzu wenhua xuekan* 7.2 (2015): 57-62.

³⁵⁶ SSLS, 5.

to the *kuan* as a judicial authority precisely because he did not want the case to move up to the Qing legal system:

“...on the twenty-eighth day, the victim followed [us] to this hamlet, where, on the base of a building, they apprehended true evidence [of the crime]. The victim desired to tear down our home, and have us tied up and sent to officials to receive a fine. We immediately beseeched this hamlet’s *xiangtuan kuanzhu* Liu Kaihou, Liu Kaixian, Lu Zhitai, Li Kaiji, Liu Ruihe and others, to beseech the victim, and persuade them that within three days fireworks will be bought, red streamers hung, and the cow returned.

In the end, our hearts were evil, and our craftiness on display...so that on the 29th, we had the cow hidden in another place, and covered its tracks. By the first day of the eighth month, the victim gathered a *kuan* to come, of over ten people, to compel the *tuan* and others to hand over the stolen goods. We disobeyed and did not recognize their commands...the *xiangtuan* had no choice...but to go up to the prefectural seat and furnish a report. We know on our own cognizance that our rationale is crooked, we again beseech the *sanzhai xiangtuan* and others, beseech this hamlet’s *xiangtuan kuanzhu* Liu Kaihou and others to persuade Liu Xiuyu, Liu Zongkui, Liu Zongxiang to willingly take 6,600 *wen* as compensation, and that the *zhongkuan* 众款 will have the cow returned to the Longs to settle matters...If [we] repeat our misdeeds, we undertake to follow the *sanzhai xiangtuan* to send us over to officials for reporting.”³⁵⁷

On establishing the link between the *kuan* and the militia, this document is noteworthy for the following. It establishes that for most people in the village, the court of first instance was the *kuan*, and that it was recognized as having been attached to the *tuanlian*. It was recognized as

³⁵⁷ JZDB, 138.

having the authority to broker and issue settlements, of which this document is one example. It establishes that even if we cannot make a direct link between the *kuan* and the *tuanlian* through a document recording appointment, at the very least, it could share leadership in the unity of the same person, here Liu Kaihou—a sensible overlap if *baojia-tuanlian* leadership in Liping prefecture indeed relied on village gentry of high social and economic standing rather than non-entities. Given the purpose for which this whole interaction with the *kuan* was started after the theft—that is, to avoid any involvement with Qing judicial procedures—it seems the *kuan* still persisted underneath the wrapping of *tuanlian* in the aftermath of the mid-century rebellions.

On the organizational side, we can also identify possible continuities and discontinuities from the period preceding the intensification of the militia system. It seems that, just as we might expect from a conventional *baojia* organization tasked with surveillance over the population, the *kuan*-militia could and did send up reports of crimes up to the magistrate's *yamen*. However, in practice (just as we might expect for *baojia* elsewhere), there was autonomy in choosing whether reports had to advance up the system or not. We see here, in a more direct fashion that has so far not appeared in other sources in the 19th century, just how fragmented the *kuan* could be, broken up into cellular units of villages or *xiaokuan* that confronted each other and eventually cooperated in this case. Finally, there are hints within this text of how the *kuan* retained a consensual organization that did not lean solely on the social prestige or authority of a singular *kuantou*. Enforcing the settlement in the end counted on “the masses of the *kuan*” (*zhongkuan*), and the appeal to Liu Kaihou, despite being named as *kuanzhu*, was lined up alongside other eminent villagers, and may have been merely the first among rough equals. The question of autonomy aside, the eventual result was the *kuan*-militia reporting to the magistrate, seen in a report that follows in the Jiuzhai *baojia* collection.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ JZDB, 140.

We see a similar perception of the local governance role of the *kuan* in the following document, though here there is the additional idea that the *kuan* was not just a court of first instance, but a body of laws that were agreed upon, defining the categories of crime and their corresponding punishments:

“Establishing this admonishment contract [*jieyuezi* 戒约字] are Shiyin zhai *xiaocun* and [Cengong]. The court has laws [*guofa*], the village has regulations [*tiaoli*]. At the first instance, our locale’s men and women join their labor to cultivate [*land*]... Our *tuan* had publicly deliberated that, first, it is not permitted to take out swords in the day, and second, that it is not permitted to play with money and gamble...Now, I, Luoyao, father and son Cheng’en, Chengyuan, Chengbang...for they took out a sword in broad daylight and caused trouble. Now, there are the local *shipai kuanshou* and others who rigorously dealt with us [*jin you difang zhong shipai kuanshou ren deng yan chu wo fuzi* 今有地方众十牌款首人等严楚(处)我父子].

Now, we know by our own cognizance that our reasoning is crooked. We beseech the *tuan* and others, that we willingly establish that forevermore, it will not be permitted to make trouble, and we now rely on the local *xiangtuan shouren* Liu Kaixian, Liu Zhitai, Liu Kaihou, Liu Qiaoren and others...if we repeat the crime, we undertake to follow the local militia and others to be sent to officials for reporting...”³⁵⁹

This rationale for bringing this case to the *kuan* was similar to the last case we saw. The defendants committed a crime of taking out sharp weapons in the day, and causing trouble of an unspecified nature. However, they sought to avoid any encounter with the magistrate’s *yamen*, appealing to the “*kuan* leader of the ten *pai* and others [*shipai kuanshou ren deng* 十牌款首人

³⁵⁹ JZDB, 142.

等],” on the promise that the offense would not be repeated so as to keep the case within the bounds of the village.³⁶⁰ There are several passages here that are of note however. It emphasizes the confusion that villagers regarding the overlap of the *baojia-tuanlian* and the *kuan*, giving the *kuan* leadership the hybrid title of “*kuan* leader of the ten *pai* [*shipai kuanshou ren deng* 十牌款首人等].”³⁶¹ More importantly however, we see how the *kuan* continued to operate as a body of customary law, with specific provisions that were known to village members, and could be referenced as the *kuanshou* dealt with a crime. Here, specifically, we see a common textual formula found in *kuan* regulations stating that specific acts were “publicly deliberated” [*gongyi* 公议] to have been prohibited.

The monetary penalties that were imposed in these rulings remained the main punishment tool of the *kuan*—and the only one we have seen in actual documents (there is possibility of execution by drowning as a *kuan* tradition at this time, but this has not been documented in very clear terms, as far as I know). In another case that involved the harboring of outsiders and public gambling, the defendants referred to the *kuan* in the specific context of the monetary penalty. “Now...remembering our initial offense, [we willingly pay] the *kuan* of the masses [*zhongkuan* 众款] a compensatory penalty [*peili* 赔礼], putting out upon the *kuan* 2000 *wen* to settle matters”

Overall, what the documents expressed collectively was the rough interchangeability of the *baojia-tuanlian* and the *kuan*. It was led by the same people, had overlapping functions, and had a dualistic (as both local, and of the Qing) character that proved useful to some of Jiuzhai’s most troublesome villagers, as well as its supervising magistrates. It could and did have the power to arrest and report misdeeds to the magistrate. But it also had the power to retain these cases within its sphere, and present itself as the age-old institution that settled matters fully within its

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

confines. This nature might be succinctly expressed with another seemingly confused statement by men who wrote an appeal: “We defer to follow the local *shipai shouren*, or the *zhongkuan*’s administration of the masses, or the sending to officials for investigation and handling.”³⁶² The *tuanlian* in Jiuzhai, and likely the rest of the region, had many institutional faces, but to villages, it retained a unity that could be tactically manipulated to pursue their own ends.

Re-constituting Order

As the *kuanyue* were swept up in the militarization of rural society in the Qingshui river basin, they began to produce, transmit, and retain documentation of their policing activities, encompassing a broad field of social conflict from disputes over property, to marriage, and interpersonal violence. Most of the sources we have on forest disputes, banditry, theft and other activities can be dated to the very late Qing and the early Republic. The greater number of such documents coming from this period is not enough to even suggest that a phenomenon of declining public order and security of property is a stronger phenomenon in the Republic relative to the Qing. The principal issue is that there is a possible bias in the time distribution of documents towards the late Qing and the Republic.

The issue is not a simple function of a higher rate of survival for documents dating from the late-nineteenth century onwards—in fact fewer documents can be seen overall as time went on—but because of the higher volume of dated communications with the *tuan-bao* and the magistrates with the formalization of the state’s links to the indigenous peoples of southeastern Guizhou. A large number of forest disputes, complaints, and other similar documents were also left undated and are not useful for determining temporal changes. Other problems include the subjectivity inherent in the documents, mostly complaints and petitions, where the writers have an incentive to “size up” their case by stating that somebody was physically harmed, threatened

³⁶² JZDB, 158.

harm, or possessed weapons. Competing views from the depositions or counter-plaints of the accused (as we might be able to examine if we were looking at a county archive instead of family archives) tend not to be available to check on the claims made in these documents. Finally, in the context of a broad decline of timber industry activity, an argument can also be made that documents on disorder in the Republic were made by those who determined to remain in the business, and thus may be an underrepresentation of the scale at which the protection of property was a problem at this time. For these reasons, tracking the typology of documents over time, as has been done before to try and re-assess the extent of disorder in the late Qing, is insufficient.³⁶³ Instead, I will attempt to pair an old-fashioned approach of citing individual observations of general conditions by those in positions of power, with an approach that puts exceptional cases of people breaking the restraints imposed by kinship or ritual in pursuit of economic or other ends.

Table 16: Category and Time Distribution of Jiuzhai Baojia Criminal Incidents							
Banditry	Homicide	Gambling	Thievery	Forgery	Kidnapping	Robbery	Other
10	5	5	4	3	5	11	6
1881-1885	1886-1890	1891-1895	1896-1900	1901-1905	1906-1910	1911-1915	NA
0	5	2	2	5	10	1	24

Beginning with the writings from local magistrates, as noted previously, their orders and other documents before 1898 mostly had to do with settling post-rebellion accounts and shoring up the charity granaries. After this, we can see a new concern with robberies and other similar activities in the documents. An 1899 order from Liping magistrate Li postulated that a rise in gambling, robbery, burglary and other illegal activities “[have] all been caused by the loosening

³⁶³ Miller, “Crime and Rebellion.”

of *baojia*.³⁶⁴ The orders from later magistrates addressed to Liu Kaihou as *baojia* head tell us that these were probably not isolated. The succeeding magistrate of Liping, magistrate Wan, repeated the order to tighten *baojia* in 1900, seeking to weed out bandits among the ranks of the locals. He complained that “since [he] came down from his carriage [to assume his post], he inquired and heard regarding robbery and theft cases, that they have occurred one after another in the past year. This is all because the *zongjia* people are [treating *baojia*] as a nominal task, and do not earnestly implement it.”³⁶⁵

Were these just timeless tropes from magistrates about the ungovernability of southeastern Guizhou, along the lines of constant complaints on the porous borders with Guangxi and Hunan provinces, or of its large jurisdictional area? More specific complaints from the magistrates suggest that they were in fact dealing with more than vague threats to public order, and that they indeed had concrete reasons to call for a tightening of social controls and readiness. Liping magistrate Wan cited the recent robberies by roving bandits and outflow of refugees based on reports from neighboring jurisdictions like Xingyi, Renhuai, and Huaiyuan in Guizhou and Guangxi specifically to justify the collection of grain for military rations.³⁶⁶ And rather than calling just for generalized tightening of security, they did call for the arrests of specific persons thought to pose a danger to local stability.³⁶⁷

The most compelling evidence comes from the activities of local *bao-tuan* leaders themselves. As mentioned in previous chapters, the traditional political formations like the *kuanyue* were ad hoc, coming together in moments of crisis, and dispersing in their aftermath, even as they were prodded to build a more permanent base of power through standing funds.

³⁶⁴ JZDB, 14.

³⁶⁵ JZDB, 15.

³⁶⁶ JZDB, 20.

³⁶⁷ See for example JZDB, 29.

These political formations were typically convened in response to the threat of a major breakdown in public order. The last of these conventions of the *kuanyue* in Jiuzhai, as indicated to us by the records preserved by Liu Kaihou's ancestors, occurred in 1852, in the aftermath of Hu Linyi's tour of the hamlets and his call to assemble *tuanlian* and *baojia* through local elites.³⁶⁸ The next re-convention of the local militia in Jiuzhai happened after more than half a century, in 1907, in line for the time when we start observing a peak in violent incidents in the rest of the *bao-tuan* documents. Written on bright red paper, it states that "lately, current conditions have become increasingly difficult, with bandit gangs wantonly going about without fear. Not only are these robber bandits incredibly numerous. More than this, [the number of those who have been robbed] are growing in number."³⁶⁹

Documents on the convention of local militias such as this, given their rarity, serve as markers of periods when the security situation was deteriorating, when local elites, whatever the exact details of the threats they were facing, felt compelled to put together scarce material resources and suspend norms over handling bandits and criminals. The commitments made in this convention of 1907—which, as we have seen in the previous section, do not deserve to be treated as empty letters—were substantial. Militiamen who were injured in the course of duty were to be given several taels to recuperate. Those who died on duty were promised a proper cremation and burial, and a death gratuity of 80 taels, to be awarded to their families.³⁷⁰ The population was to be rigorously combed and registered. Large monetary rewards were to be given to those who captured or killed bandits.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ JZDB, 73. As Hu already left his post as Liping prefect at the time, the command was issued by his successor.

³⁶⁹ JZDB, 75.

³⁷⁰ JZDB, 75.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

The phenomenon of local militias re-mobilizing after several decades of relative quiet was not isolated to Jiuzhai. Militias elsewhere in the Qingshui river basin also mobilized for similar reasons in the final years of the Qing dynasty. A petition signed by the gentry militia leaders of the timber monopoly hamlets from around the same time states that “since the rebels have begun to be rectified, local bandits have arisen in all four directions, and successively harassed Liuji, even Xiaojiang [the area where Jiuzhai is located], Wangzhai, and other places. Though by the assembly of militias through virtuous subjects, [the rebels] have been beaten back, the fire of banditry still burns brightly in the Four Foot Cattle locale of the southern route.”

The Four Foot Cattle (*sijiaoniu* 四腳牛) locale referred to here by the monopoly hamlet leaders in their petition as the heart of bandit activities in the area was a Qing revival of a Dong *kuan* alliance that led a major rebellion in the Ming dynasty.³⁷² In this instance, however, local elites did not consider the state (by this time the Republic) up to the task of suppressing the Four Foot Cattle *kuan*. “Liping prefecture,” they assert without embellishment, “has troops that are few in number, and grain that is poor in quality.” “It is difficult to protect the seat and the villages without anxiety.”³⁷³

An even harsher assessment from a separate local militia alliance accused the prefecture of abandoning their posts and leaving locals out to dry while they hoped for rescue from the New Armies and the Xiang Army.³⁷⁴ Hence they assembled several tens of *kuan* on the northern route to establish their own “mutual protection militia defense bureau” (*huwei tuanfang zongju*), which collected grain taxes at the rate of 15 *wen* per *shi* in the name of the Republic from the villages to fund its operations.

³⁷² Xu, *Kuanyuefa*, 46-47.

³⁷³ YZF, 15-16.

³⁷⁴ YZF, 20.

This bureau was led by a Wendou man named Jiang Dengpan. It had a force of at least 1400 men, and assisted neighboring areas that also mobilized militias whenever they came under bandit attack.³⁷⁵ However, despite the immense political capital that militia leaders obtained for themselves in the aftermath of the rebellion, there are signs that official attitudes towards the increased power of the *kuanyue* and local militia contained some ambivalence. An 1874 stele, erected in the years after the end of the rebellion, gives us some evidence of this ambivalence. While it was found in Jianhe, at some distance from most of the villages discussed in this dissertation (but within Liping prefecture at the time), it still marks the discomfort of the officials who tolerated their operation.

“In the Liping area, neighboring groups form alliances, called ‘*liankuan* [联款, the united *kuan*].’ Hereafter, these alliances must not be mobilized for minor matters. Only when encountering organized bands of bandits causing disturbances in multiple areas may the alliance members jointly mobilize for defense. For everyday theft and robbery cases, only the neighboring militia groups should handle them, and all suspects must be handed over to officials. Joint mobilization to conduct river burnings, killings, or executions is prohibited. Those who violate this by mobilizing the alliance for minor matters will be severely punished.”³⁷⁶

While we cannot trace the path of how attitudes in Liping evolved from 1874 to the Jiang Dengpan case, by the latter, a somewhat distant ambivalence was replaced by direct official coercion of the local militia head. The leader of the northern route militia, the Wendou hamlet resident Jiang Dengpan, was put in prison and executed by the Liping magistrate after luring him into the prefectural seat. The main accusation against Jiang was the extortion of money through

³⁷⁵ YZF, 15-16.

³⁷⁶ SSLS, 17-18

the collection of taxes in the name of the militia. The spirited protests by militia organizations across the area, arguing that Jiang's arrest constituted a severe injustice given their service at this moment of prolonged crisis, are suggestive of the tensions that were latent in the relationship between the magistrate and the gentry-led militia.³⁷⁷

Private letters between individuals and local stories do not betray much about the general situation from the perspective of those who were not serving as officials or militia leaders. It is possible, however, to catch the occasional glimpse of what they thought about the security of their life and property through contracts and steles. Multiple steles in the late Qing and the early Republic complained specifically about the declining security of timber plantations. Most common is the invoking of moral decay as a cause for damage to property. An 1897 stele from Zhangshan for example brings up the idea that in the past, people respected by consensus that “ancient” trees were to be allowed to mature before cutting. This may be referring to the common practice of sparing old anchor trees from the cutting cycle.³⁷⁸ By the Guangxu period, it was claimed, people engaged in abuses like peeling off bark, branches and other useful woody material (presumably from the old anchor trees as well as the younger plantation trees) for their private use.³⁷⁹

A stele dated to 1912 recording the outcome of a public meeting in Ganwu hamlet of the Lower Militia remarks that, despite common knowledge of the importance of forestry to the local economy owing to the lack of arable land, people have become increasingly short-sighted and narrowly self-interested. It states that “in recent years, the people whose hearts desired leisure, and detested labor have grown very numerous, and often those who cut *shanmu* had not a glimpse of its planting...[the people] only pursue the profits of the present, and care not for

³⁷⁷ See YZF, 15-33. For a brief overview, see JPXZ, 1337-1339.

³⁷⁸ Xu, “Qingshuijiang shisheng miao.”

³⁷⁹ YZF, 266.

wealth in the future. As well, [their] desire for the spring of profit is inexhaustible - to use it without drying it up is difficult!”³⁸⁰ Notable in this statement is not just a sense of moral decay, which is not unique to later texts, but the notion that their forest resources were hurtling towards a path of exhaustion if the hamlet leaders made no intervention.

Four years later, in 1915, a handwritten document from Bijie hamlet 俾嗟寨 records along similar lines how a recently convened *kuanyue* had faced an unstable social field in recent times. Unusually among the documents I have encountered, this makes an explicit link between the *kuanyue* and forest protection, similar to what we have seen in steles and other scattered mentions of the *kuanyue*’s role in maintaining social order:

“[For we have] in this time encountered the chaos of the age, we have bound our *kuan* to be of one mind. [However] its bonds have been uneven, as its prohibitions have been loose. Now, our hamlet’s soldiers and subjects are not of one mind. They repeatedly make prohibitions, and they repeatedly commit crimes. Our locale has many mountains, little land. It relies completely on the cultivation and protection of mountain lands for the planting and growing of trees, whether it is *shanmu*, *songmu*, tung, or wax. All these things are enough to nurture the people, and be of benefit to the people’s use.”³⁸¹

The document proceeds to lament about, and announce prohibitions on activities that were generally harmful to forestry. Here, specifically, the *kuanyue* prohibited actions such as illegal cutting, negligent setting of fires, harboring of colluding with strangers or outsiders.³⁸² From these steles and documents in the late Qing and the early Republic, we see indigenous narratives of environmental declension—a story of an idealized, sustainable past crumbling into a

³⁸⁰ YZF, 267-268. A common formulation for writers complaining about the decline in public morals and the environment is to say that “people’s hearts are not like those of the ancients” (*ren xin bu gu* 人心不古).

³⁸¹ “Kuanyue 款约,” 26-1-1-005, 1915, QJSJS, 473.

³⁸² Ibid.

disastrous present—developing as a way of framing the difficulties of the time, available, as it were, “off the shelf” for historians to use without prodding.

Other possible measures of instability or insecurity in the socio-economic order over this time could be the frequency of *fenjia*, or increased sales of paddy rice fields—the class of land that owners should have been most reluctant to let go of because of their scarcity, and whose sale marks a major transfer of economic power from one segment of the village to another. However, a preliminary measure of *fenjia* frequency and paddy rice field sales yields no obvious trend of instability.

Figure 7: Fenjia Contracts over Time

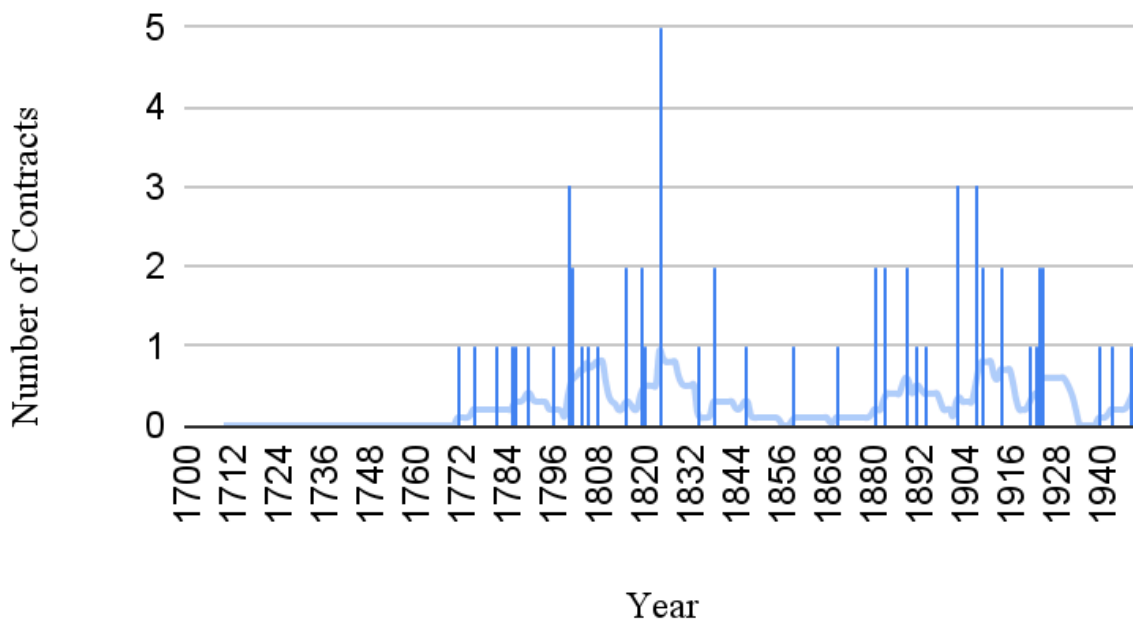


Figure 8: Paddy Rice Field Sales Value

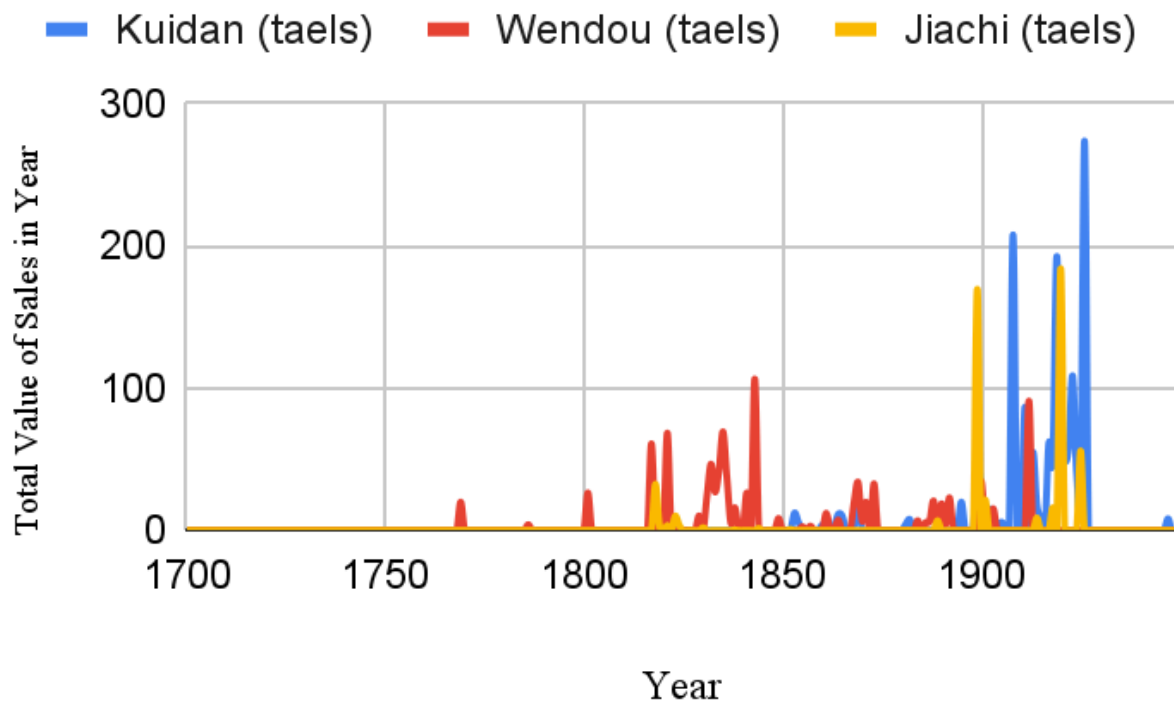


Figure 9: Paddy Rice Field Sales (Number)

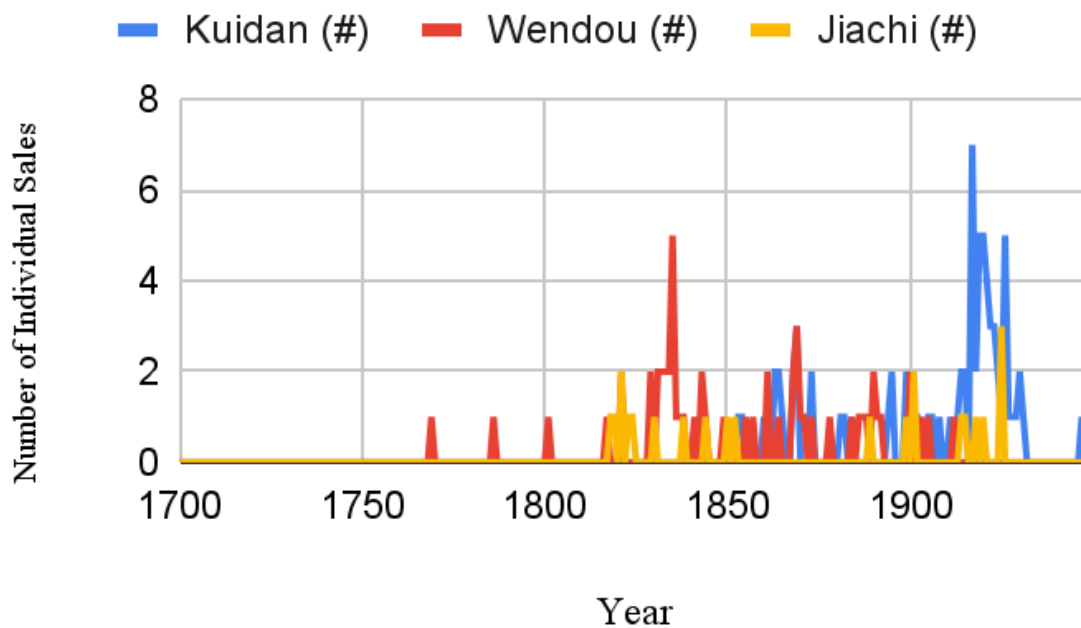
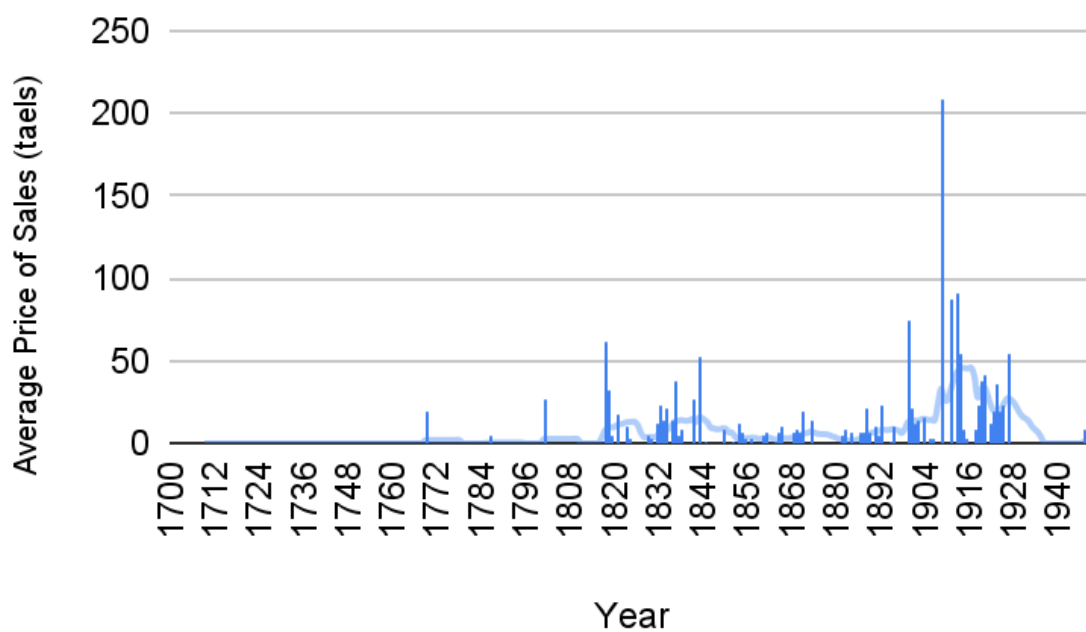


Figure 10: Average Price for Paddy Rice Field Sales



There were other faint signals of distress, with the breaking bonds of kinship or defiling the sacred in pursuit of monetary gain. Just as with the cutting of temple or monastery trees elsewhere in China, these cases can certainly be read as the failure of symbolic or normative defenses in preserving trees.³⁸³ As we will see, a key difficulty that arose in these cases was that the perpetrators of the most socially intolerable cuttings were evidently more mobile, leaving the old order of village and compact enforced norms in the dust. The cases certainly should be seen as exceptional amidst the greater mass of forests that were left unmolested, however, they should serve as a signal from the low frequency cases about just how difficult it is to protect forests of no special distinction.

One taboo that was breached with serious disapproval of local elites was the prohibition of cutting on *fengshui* forests. Fengshui forests can be considered as a part of the larger subset of collective forests in the Qingshui river area, together with lineage forests, association forests, endowment forests, and *kuan* forests. Fengshui forests were treated with immense importance by their owners, who made a close association between fengshui and the fortunes of their lineages and other collective entities. We see the value placed on these propitious locations not just from lineage narratives, but also in the different transactions and disputes that we see across time, through the hiring of geomantic masters from Hunan, or reparations paid for changes that damage the local *fengshui*.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ See Menzies, *Forests and Land Management*, 65-74.

³⁸⁴ To see just one especially detailed example of harm to fengshui and grave land forests, see BZR F0040, which recounts the history of a property and has some narration of the process of resolution with the local middlemen. Fengshui forests remain an important form of collective forest in southeastern Guizhou in present day, carrying older and more diverse stocks of trees versus household forests, which are generally *shanmu* monocultures. See Lu Zhiyao, Charles Peters, Mark Ashton, Jinchao Feng, and Xue Dayuan, “The Effect of Forest Tenure on Forest Composition in a Miao Area of Guizhou, China,” *Mountain Research and Development* 36.2 (2016): 193-202.

Despite their value, *fengshui* forests were not spared from clearings. A stele dated to 1917, again citing the moral degeneration among the people, laments the cutting of *fengshui* forests to obtain firewood and to open up gardens for planting *zaliang*. It was decided to permit gardens older than twenty years to stand. Those younger than twenty years were to be planted over with trees “so as to cultivate fengshui.” The residents of the village and its neighboring areas are to be strictly prohibited from cutting or damaging the trees in any way, “without regard for what type of wood material,” suggesting a worry that even if the trees were not cleared, they would still be stripped of any woody material that could be taken.³⁸⁵

Much the same could be said about ancestral graves, which can also be classified as a sacred forest. In one village, locals were accused of building pathways and letting livestock graze on these grave sites, and of exposing the many coffins and corpses of people who died just decades before in the rebellions. Small groups of itinerant “layabout” bandits were accused of scouting out the village during the day, then stealing from homes and setting fires in the forest during the night. The local militia in union with the Liping magistrate responded by declaring a prohibition on stealing timber, setting fires, and grazing livestock.³⁸⁶

The milder, “everyday” strains on social norms were to be seen more in kinsmen stealing from property and occasionally threatening physical harm to each other, as we have seen in the case of Wendou’s Jiang Xixiang, selling off a plot of ancestral property to a third party without the knowledge of other lineage members. These were not the spectacles that cutting down *fengshui* and gravesite forests were, and so these strains are seen more in contracts. Petty theft could be given a pass. A man named Luo Chengyuan engaged the *bao-tuan* headman Liu Kaihou in a partnership to own a forest property with 100 logs. Two of Luo’s relatives stole five logs in

³⁸⁵ YZF, 297-298.

³⁸⁶ YZF, 266-267.

the winter, but he found them out and sent them off to his business partner, the *bao-tuan* headman. They went through a dispute mediation, acknowledged their wrongs to the *kuan* and paid an unspecified but likely nominal fine—a routine ending to a minor incident between kinsmen.³⁸⁷ Even a more serious charge, like selling a sacrificial plot without the knowledge of other kinsmen, was simply resolved by having the property returned to its original purpose.³⁸⁸ Escalation, if necessary, went first through local mediators, then either a trial by ordeal, or a lawsuit filed with local officials.³⁸⁹

Overall, from these observations, we can come to some of the same conclusions on the state of forest property in the Qingshuijiang basin that Anne Osborne arrived at for the Lower Yangzi.³⁹⁰ Timber rustling, theft, litigation, and other violations of property rights had become common. And their prevalence discouraged investment in timber, with forest cultivators withdrawing from the business. Timber could keep on growing and being cut as before, but cultivation was probably more haphazard and disorganized. People were reported to have stopped bothering with replanting, or worse, considered afforestation was “a dangerous path” that exposed one to numerous and organized predators who awaited them in this time.³⁹¹

Beyond internal changes, part of the challenge in defending the old social and economic order was the growth in numbers and organization of migrants from across the border in Hunan. One marker that roughly indexes the growth in number and organization of migrants was the establishment of native place associations. These had become evident even in more peripheral areas like the Xiao river by the mid-1800s, by which time Jiangxinese and Hunanese associations

³⁸⁷ JZDB, 157.

³⁸⁸ YZF, 237-238.

³⁸⁹ See for example BZR F0037-F0040.

³⁹⁰ Osborne, “Lowlands and Highlands,” 209-210.

³⁹¹ JPLZ, 58.

could be found.³⁹² In Longzhai, the leaders of the Hunan-Hubei native place association (*lianghu huiguan* 两湖会馆) named Ding Shizhong and He Shangyuan, were accused of using various pretexts, and of using fabricated property booklets, to ignore Miao forest property rights. The two engaged in large-scale, itinerant clear cutting of large quantities of timber in 1902 (investigators found 1,840 logs left on site which were harvested but not moved to the river), going so far as to physically restraining Miao property owners who resisted. The magistrate in the end sided with the Miao landowners, and handed down a punishment to Ding Shizhong of one hundred strokes of the cane, and exile. This was one indicator of emergent social institutions that could use its “power and influence to forcibly occupy Miao mountains and timber, and hiring workers to cut [*ji lianghu huiguan shengshi qiangzhan Miaomin deng shanchang muzhi gufu chuifa* 籍两湖会馆声势强占苗民等山场木植雇夫吹伐].”³⁹³

Conclusion

The changes in the Qingshui river area from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century are difficult to categorize. On one hand, through the case of the Jiuzhai *bao-tuan*, we see a specific instance of a broader trend of the “bureaucratization” of the *kuan* and other similar indigenous alliance compacts. Unlike before, when the links between state and indigene were mostly informal and ad hoc, the new administrative and documentary demands on the person of the *bao-tuan* head created new agents of the state in the area who could actually extend rule effectively down to the household level. Hu Linyi’s implementation of the *bao-tuan* system marks the final chapter of an ambition stretching back to the Yongzheng conquests to fully extend territorial rule to southeastern Guizhou.

³⁹² Zhu, *Yimin*, 165-202.

³⁹³ “Wei shenli Guizhou Liping fu Ding Shizhong qiyi qiangzhan miaomin Yang Shengcai deng shanchang kanfa shumu yi an shi zhi xingbu 为审理贵州黎平府丁时中起意强占苗民杨胜才等山场砍伐树木一案事致刑部,” 1902, 16-01-017-000003-0017, FHA.

On the other hand, the bureaucratization of indigenous leaders and the extension of state control to the grassroots level did not equate to greater security of life and property. Southeastern Guizhou after the implementation of the *bao-tuan* system went through a mixed bag of results by these measures. The first decades after implementation were extraordinarily bloody, with militia groups forming across the area in response to banditry and rebellion. The period of reconstruction in its aftermath was more stable, with few major incidents and barely any documentation of petty disputes. Banditry, property crimes, and violent crimes saw a resurgence in the final years of the Qing, and continued onwards to the Republic. If the patterns of timber contracting activity might be thought of as the pulse of local society, we can regard this final period as some of the worst that the Qingshui river area had seen, with declining commercial activity and security.

Overall, the legacy of these new linkages between state and indigene through *bao-tuan* was contradictory. They created new agents of the state who reached the grassroots in ways that in the past were at best temporary, or pro forma. And yet they were also heavily taxing to elites in a period of extraordinary social and economic strain. The newly institutionalized powers of Qing agents still struggled to cope with the challenges of the time, as the bond of social feeling that may have been partially responsible for a more orderly past began to fray, and migrants grew in number and organization. Nevertheless, it would be hasty to conclude that the decline in commercial timber activity in the Qingshui river area could be attributed mainly to the inability of the *bao-tuan* to reign in timber thefts and interpersonal violence. Coincident with the establishment of *bao-tuan* in southeastern Guizhou, changes were afoot, which complicated the story by linking the fortunes of this small corner in southwest China to the activities of shipping

magnates from San Francisco, architects and engineers in Shanghai, traders from Mitsui and Mitsubishi, and loggers from Washington and Oregon state.

CHAPTER 6: THE GLOBALIZATION OF TIMBER MARKETS IN REPUBLICAN CHINA

Introduction

Beginning with the end of the First World War, the *shanmu* that had flowed from Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Fujian down to consumers in the lower Yangzi met adversaries of a novel quality and quantity: Lumber from the United States, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In 1918, China's net import of timber was 103,687,730 board feet, valued at 3,522,822 *haikwan* taels. A decade later, in 1928, total imports reached 309,532,000 board feet, valued at 11,150,187 *haikwan* taels. Half of these imports came from the United States, a quarter from the Japanese Empire.

Writers commenting on the timber industry in China expressed a sense of crisis. The number of trading firms in the Southern City Market of Shanghai, which specialized in the domestic timber trade, decreased from bankruptcies in the 1920s. Oregon Pine, commonly referred to as "foreign pine" (*yangsong* 洋松), was increasingly favored by builders for its convenience. It was large batches, pre-cut into squares, blocks, planks and boards by machine saws, ready to use for construction. *Shanmu* came in round logs that needed laborious and wasteful processing with specialized tools and skilled sawyers. The markets that remained for *shanmu* were in the traditional, artisanal makers of coffins or cheap homes.³⁹⁴ It became a common editorial prescription that the timber industry needed to modernize, or else the building of all things in China, from homes, to colleges, and coffins, will also come under the hands of foreigners.

³⁹⁴ Hong Xingchi 洪兴炽, "Zhongguo mucai weiji zhi xianzhuang 中国木材危机之现状," *Dongfang zazhi* 31.22 (1934): 91-94; Zhou Wenhui 周文辉, "Diaocha Guizhou linye baogao 调查贵州林业报告," *Nongshang gongbao* 农商公报 6.6 (1920): 130-139. "Gongshang diaocha: Gansheng muye shuailuo gaikuang 工商调查: 赣省木业衰落概况," *Shoudu guohuo daobao* 首都国货导报 12 (1935): 19; Wu Xiyuan, 吴熙元, "Gongshang diaocha: Wuhan zhi mucai ye 工商调查: 武汉之木材业," *Hankou shangye yuekan* 汉口商业月刊 2.6 (1935): 75-78.

Forests had to be grown and protected, modern sawmills built, firms re-organized along the western lines, and protections raised if the industry was to survive.³⁹⁵

Economic decline or stagnation has remained a persistent motif in the literature on the Republic. This period remains thought of as a time of difficulty, attributed to a widespread decline in public order, the rise of exploitative forest harvesting, and the emergence of foreign competition.³⁹⁶ The same can be said for studies of the Qingshui river's timber industry. The Republic is portrayed as a period of difficulty, though the empirical evidence remains inconclusive. This chapter is an attempt to shed some light on this period, which is still poorly understood. I will be using a broad mix of sources from the Republican period, from Chinese timber industry journals, gazetteers, surveys, investigations (*diao cha*), and public records. I will also be using archival records from timber trading corporations in China, as well as the United States. Many of the last group of sources, from non-Chinese archives, have yet to be utilized in studies of the Chinese timber industry, both in the English and Chinese language literature. In the final section of this chapter specifically, I will also return to using *minjian wenshu* from the Qingshui river document collections to assess the information in foreign and urban sources from the standpoint of the periphery, where domestic timber was actually produced.

Together, these sources show that while timber cultivation and trading activity probably did not recover to their heights in the first and final decades of the nineteenth century, neither was there the collapse that might have been implied from reading the more limited publications of Qingshui river documents like the *Byōzoku Ringyō* collection, for which the document base is

³⁹⁵ Ibid. Elena Songster, "Cultivating the Nation in Fujian's Forests: Forest Policies and Afforestation Efforts in China, 1911-1937," *Environmental History* 8.3 (2003): 452-473.

³⁹⁶ Zhang, *Timber and Forestry*; Nicholas Menzies, *Forests and Land Management in Late Imperial China*, (London: Macmillan, 1994); Wu Zhonglun, *Shanmu* 杉木, (Zhongguo Linye Chubanshe, 1983).

heavily tilted towards the Qing.³⁹⁷ Fragmentary data suggests that trading volumes were certainly lower relative to the peaks in the Qing, and the competitive position of Guizhou-Hunan *shanmu* in the lower Yangzi and Hankow markets for timber was certainly degraded. *Yangsong* won out in modern, large-scale multi-story projects, for which builders could order large, standardized batches that needed little on-site processing and were vastly more convenient to build with. However, domestic losses in this market were compensated for by higher prices, and a strong construction market that lifted all boats. Thus inland sources of timber in China were able to continue producing timber in large quantities despite the often cited difficulties of the operating environment during the Republic—a decline in public order, onerous taxes, and a weak central state that was incapable of raising protections.

We are left with a mixed picture of globalization's impact. Like the British economy, and other economies that achieved some managed to break out of an organic growth regime by the early twentieth century, the lower Yangzi relied on a resource bonanza of timber from forests in the Pacific Northwest, Manchuria and the Philippines that old hinterlands were probably incapable of supplying without deep changes in the organization and technology of timber production, transportation, and processing. At the same time, large sectors of the Chinese economy continued to rely on *shanmu* and other domestic timbers for applications from coffin making, to shipmaking and even electric poles. Beneath the facade of modern buildings, built with beams, piles, and boards of *yangsong*, there persisted a reliance on the traditional suppliers who moved *shanmu* with roughly the same institutions and technologies that had been in place since the Yongzheng emperor's time.

³⁹⁷ See the Republican-era documents in BZR.

The Economic Consequences of the Peace

The timber market made a recovery in the final decades of the Qing and the early Republic, after the sudden collapse of trading activity that came with the mid-century rebellions. We have seen from *lijin* collection numbers in the *sanjiang* brokerage villages that the volume of passing timber in the early years of the Republic sustained levels that were comparable to pre-Taiping levels. Contract issuance and transaction volumes from producers on the ground show a similar picture of recovery.³⁹⁸

During this period of recovery in the timber markets, the newly organized colonial government in the Philippines commissioned an investigation of the Chinese timber market and assessed its potential as an export market for foreign timber. Just as bottom-up tax and producer data from Guizhou suggests, the report, written by R. Rosenbluth of the New York State Conservation Commission, tells us that at this time, southwestern timber from Guizhou and Hunan continued to be among the largest of the supply areas for China's coastal cities. Both *shanmu* and *songmu* retained their dominance across different applications, especially in the biggest use cases, like the building of ordinary houses and coffin-making. Foundation piling, and even emerging use cases like electric and telephone poles remained the province of domestic timber, which was marketed as pole timber (e.g. "Foochow pole" or "Hankow pole"), with lengths of 20-40 feet with a high taper from top to bottom. Pole timbers required further on-site processing to be used as beams or planks. *Shanmu* also remained the preferred timber in China's southeast, where foreign timber like *yangsong* was thought incapable of enduring humidity and white termites.³⁹⁹ In North China, Japanese timber coming mostly from more recently opened forests in Hokkaido held a stronger market position, and it was used heavily in new applications

³⁹⁸ See Chapter 3 of the dissertation on aggregate contract data from the Qingshui river documents.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

like railroad ties.⁴⁰⁰ The Shanghai market on the other hand was the most competitive between domestic, Japanese, and North American timber.⁴⁰¹

At this time, Rosenbluth tells us, imported timber, whether from North America or Japan, already arrived in processed forms, in squares, boards, and planks. Processed timber was more convenient and cheaper to ship overseas. The raw materials came from forest-rich frontier areas in the Pacific rim: Hokkaido and Karafuto for Japan, the Pacific Northwest for the United States and Canada. These were then processed in in-country sawmills before being exported to China, where modern sawmills were limited in scale and number. One of the few sawmills in China was owned by Kow Kee Timber Corporation, (*Jiuji mucai gongsi* 九记木材公司) eventually to become one of the largest timber importers in Shanghai alongside *Xiangtai muhang* (祥泰木行 China Import & Export Lumber Co.) and *Dalai yanghang* (大来洋行 Dollar Lumber Co.).⁴⁰²

Conditions in the Pacific lumber market changed with the end of the First World War. Yangsong's competitive position in China improved as multiple factors converged in the war's aftermath. The first was overcapacity in United States lumber milling. William B. Greeley, head of the United States Forest Service in the 1920s, wrote on the eve of the war's end in 1917 that total mill capacity in 1915 was 117 billion feet in 1915, while the actual cut (and hence maximum potential utilization) was only 40.5 billion feet in 1914. Up to that point, the highest recorded annual cut in the United States was only 46 billion feet in 1907, and there was no chance that all available capacity would ever be used. Survey data specific to U.S. west coast producers that actually supplied Pacific markets (including China and Japan) tell us that this was a period in which lumber mills had a growing percentage of idle capacity despite reductions in

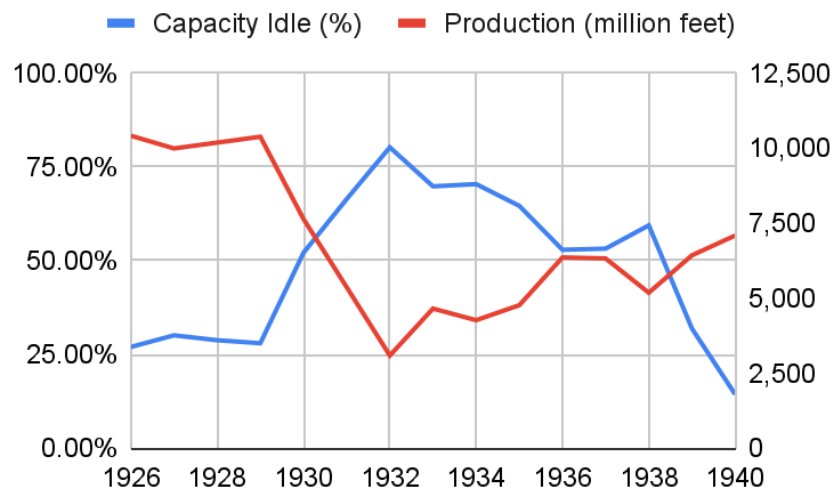
⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Franklin Howard Smith, *China And Indo-China Markets For American Lumber*, Special Agents Series no. 104, (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1915).

⁴⁰² Rosenbluth, "Forests and Timber Trade," "Renxu nian Shanghai mucai shikuang zhi jingguo 壬戌年上海木材市况之經過," *Jingji tongji* 经济统计 (February 1923): 63-65.

capacity.⁴⁰³ The quantitative survey only goes back to 1926, but an observer looking back in March 1924 from within the West Coast industry is clear that the problem goes back further. He reported that Pacific Northwest mills were suffering from “anemic” demand, and those who pivoted to cutting for China and Japan dimensions to try and capture new sources of demand ended up suffering more from having inventory that they could not dispose of elsewhere. Both mills and logging camps were already under great pressure to close down or reduce capacity well before the Great Depression.⁴⁰⁴

Figure 11: U.S. Milling Capacity



Pacific northwest stumpage prices held steady, and in fact saw a modest increase in the years immediately after the war. But the decade of calm in prices masked financial stress among stumpage and mill owners. Many timberlands were initially procured on the cheap from the public holdings, then passed along with credit (from both banks and large issuances of “timber bonds”) to speculative buyers at high prices. Speculative debts had to be paid down eventually,

⁴⁰³ West Coast Lumbermen’s Association, *West Coast Lumber Facts*, (Seattle: West Coast Lumbermen’s Association, 1941).

⁴⁰⁴ Robert C. Hill, “Indifferent Attitude of Export Market,” *The Timberman* (March 1924), 114; Robert C. Hill, “North Pacific Charter Market is Quiet,” *The Timberman* (April 1924), 114.

and as the spread between stumpage and costs of timberlands closed, a downward spiral for timber prices began. After many fat years when timber prices outpaced the general index of commodities, returns to the industry dipped into negative territory, and operators ran in a race to the bottom to keep their firms alive.⁴⁰⁵ The peak of U.S. timber exports to China thus happened within a nearly two-decade long period of deleveraging and excess capacity reduction in lumber production.

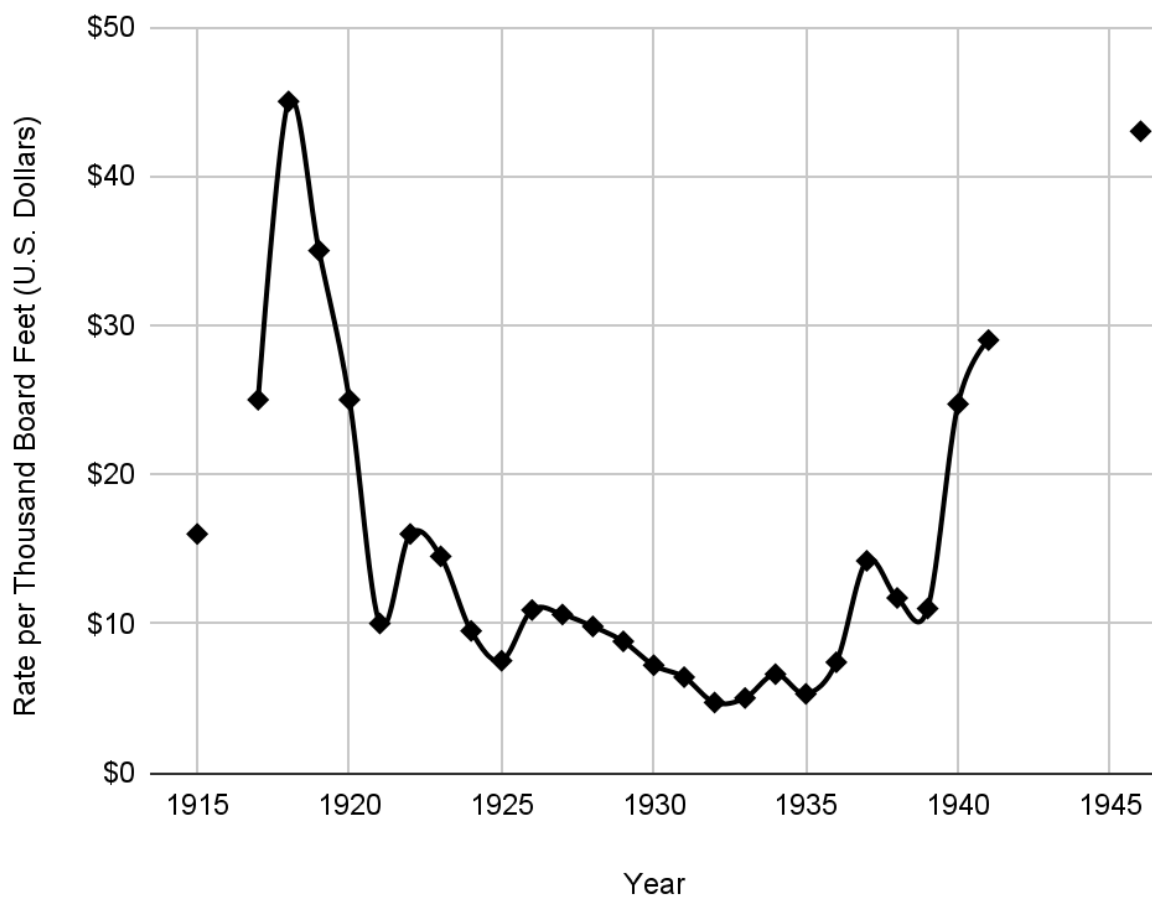
Transportation costs similarly dropped because of fundamental imbalances in the shipping industry after the war. Douglass North in his study of ocean freight rates noted that among the different commodities on the international market, lumber, because of its high freight factor (freight over c.i.f., referring to cost of goods, insurance and freight), was especially sensitive to cost of transportation, relative to other commodities like wheat.⁴⁰⁶ The end of the First World War opened an unusual twenty year window in which trans-Pacific freight rates to China from the United States west coast were low, dropping below rates of \$20 per tbf in 1921, a level it would not reach again until 1940. The ability to transport large quantities of timber at lower prices at this juncture turned west coast lumber into one of the most important export commodities, especially for trans-Pacific shippers. By volume, it was said to have been America's third largest export commodity in the Pacific, trailing only petroleum and petroleum products.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ William Greeley, *Some Public and Economic Aspects of the Lumber Industry*, (Washington D.C.: Washington, Govt. Print. Office, 1917).

⁴⁰⁶ Douglass North, "Ocean Freight Rates and Economic Development 1750-1913," *Journal of Economic History* 18.4 (Dec 1958): 537-555.

⁴⁰⁷ Ivan M. Elchibegoff, *United States International Timber Trade in the Pacific Area*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1949), 231-235.

Figure 12: Seattle-Shanghai Freight Rate Quotations for Lumber



The factors explaining the drop in freight rates at the end of the war—just like in milling—were driven by fundamental imbalances in supply and demand that took a long time to correct. In 1918, global gross tonnage reached 58.9 million tons, 36.7% higher compared to 1913, and with 6.2 million tons still in the pipeline being constructed. Meanwhile, cargos dropped to 80% of the level seen in 1913.⁴⁰⁸ *The Timberman*, a lumber trade journal, reported, almost consistently, a depressing lack of optimism for a turn in freight rates:

⁴⁰⁸ E.S. Gregg, “The Failure of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920,” *American Economic Review* 11.4 (1921): 610.

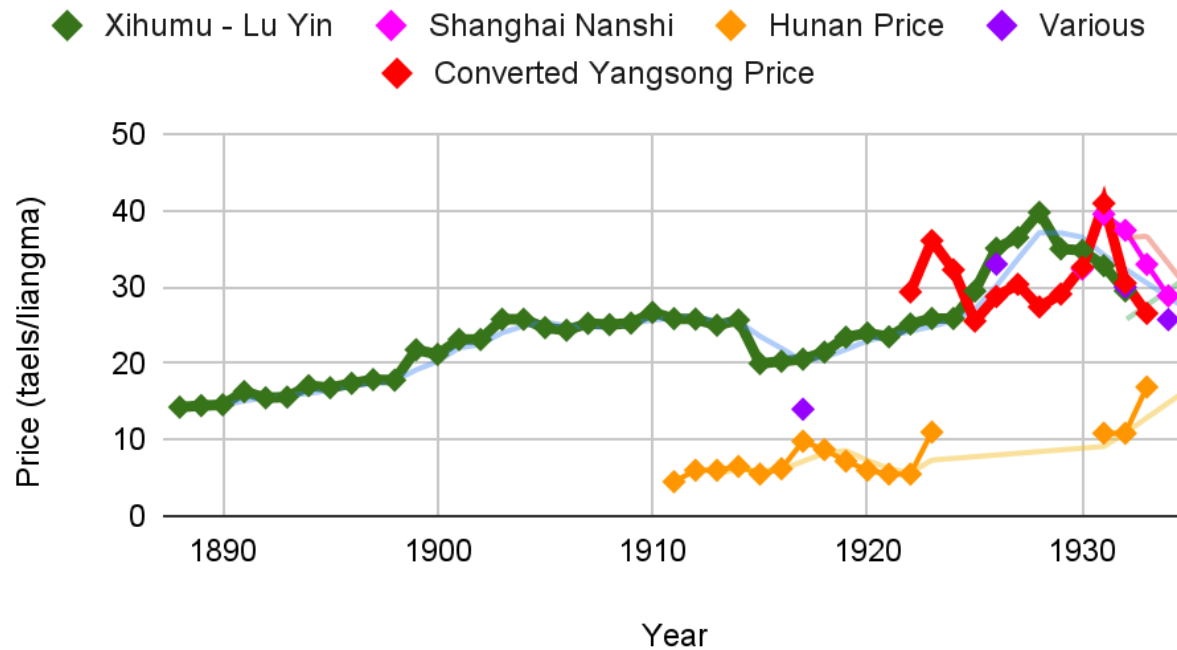
“The rate war on the trans-Pacific has been a long and ruinous story of handling business at below cost. It has effectively driven off tramp competition [that is, ships that don’t run a regular schedule], and now only the regular lines and a few chartered steamers remain in service. Open rates still prevail and shippers have been granted almost every concession requested. But low rates have not stimulated the volume of business.”

There were simply too many ships for too little cargo. Some ships were reported to have come back from Asia with only ballast, and quotes of \$10 per thousand board feet for round logs, typically the most expensive form of wood to ship, became obtainable by 1923. Customs data tell us that on aggregate, the average price of American timber for Chinese consumers did not change dramatically from 1918 onward, but a great deal of the cost that they did pay for was just shipping.

Shanmu on the other hand seemed to have grown increasingly expensive and scarce as the years passed. A series of retrospective articles from the trade journal *Muyejie* written by Lu Yin in 1940 left us an outline of the struggles in the domestic timber industry over the past 50 years. The data he provided in his publications tell us that as *yangsong* maintained its prices despite increasing volumes, *shanmu* had grown several times more expensive between the 1880s and the 1930s. *Xihumu* pole of the *fenma* class (that is, pole timber of the most common class from west of Dongting lake—via the Yuan river in Hunan, and eventually the Qingshui river in Guizhou) went from 14.27 taels per liangma in 1888 to 29.5 taels per liangma in 1931. By contrast, a possible floor price for *xihumu* from the Qingshui river basin at the monopoly brokerages was 3000 *wen* (perhaps about 2 taels depending on the exchange rate). This is based on regulations issued by the Guizhou *lijin zongju* in 1902 on the recovery of timber lost during floods,

indicating a price that assures some level of recovery for merchants.⁴⁰⁹ *Tiaozi* (stick/plank) timber also saw a long-term increase in price, from 0.13 taels for a two *zhang* piece in 1888, to 0.42 taels by 1937.⁴¹⁰

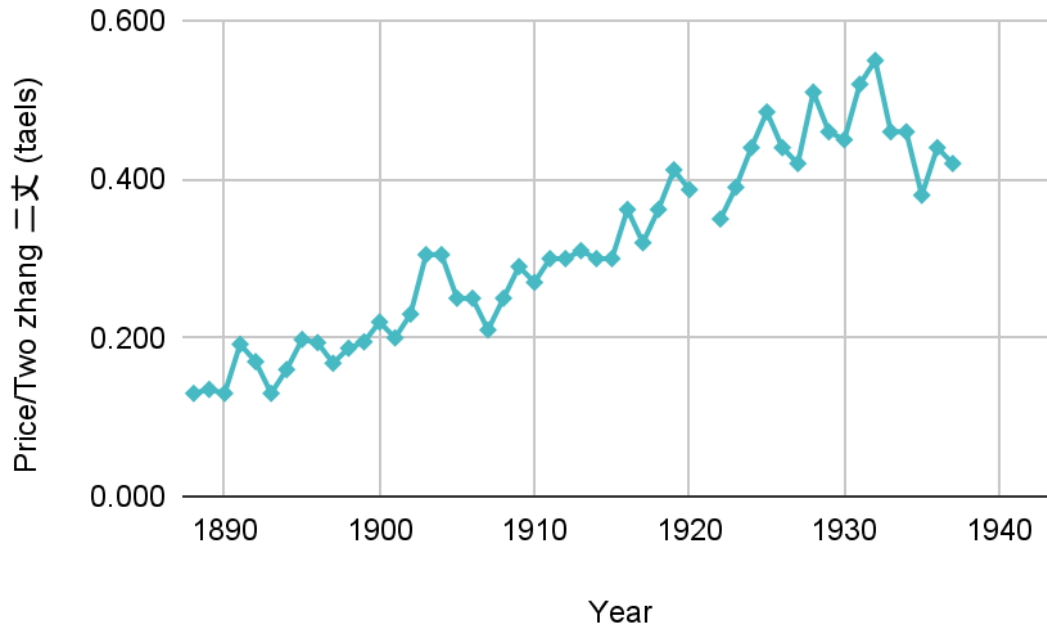
Figure 13: Xihumu Prices (taels/liangma)



⁴⁰⁹ “Yongding zhangcheng bei 永定章程碑,” in Yao Dunping 姚敦屏 ed., *Tianzhu beike ji* 天柱碑刻集, (Tianzhu: Tianzhu Xian Wenti Guangdian Luyou Ju 天柱县文体广电旅游局, 2013), 110-112.

⁴¹⁰ Li Deyu 李德舆, “Diaocha: Shanghai Shangxinhe muye qingxing 调查: 上海上新河木业情形,” *Jiangsu shengli di yi nongye xuexiao xiaoyouhui zazhi* 江苏省立第一农业学校校友会杂志 4 (1918): 33-53; Lu Yin 芦隐, “Shiliao: Nanjing Shangxinhe Wushinian Gaikuang 史料专辑: 上新河杉木业五十年概况,” *Muyejie* 木业界 1.4 (1940): 5-10; Hong, “Zhongguo mucai dongfang zazhi.”

Figure 14: Tiaomu Prices



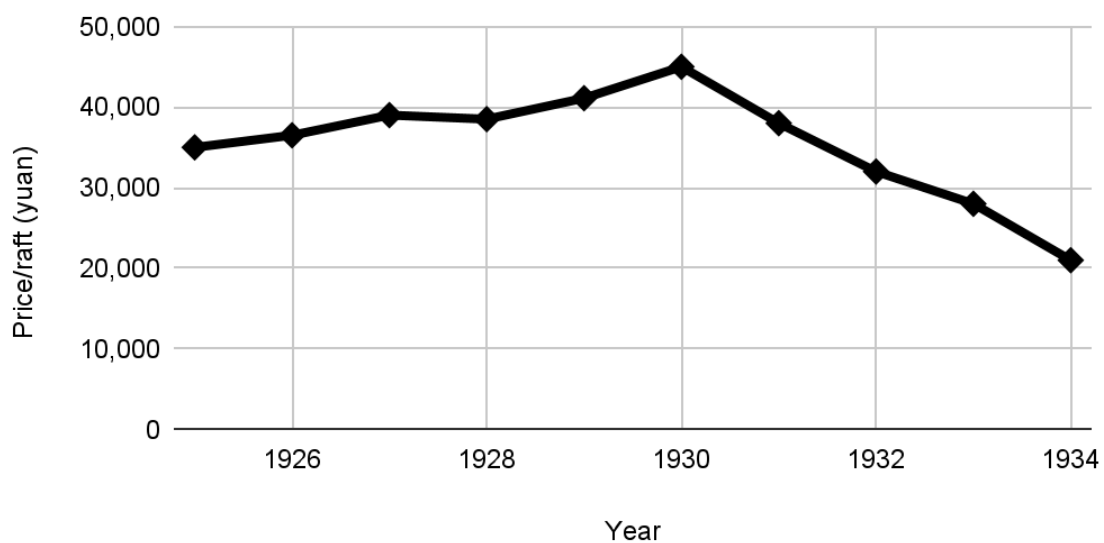
Lu Yin's data was unusually uniform and complete for the time, and he did not give us the provenance of his price series. However, individual price quotations and more partial price series from other sources suggest to us that Lu Yin's data was correct about the timber prices and price trends. A 1926 table of construction material prices, likely to be an accurate reflection of wholesale prices in Shanghai, shows that *guangmu fenma* rounds (*shanmu* of the most common class from Hunan/Guizhou) cost 33 taels per *liangma*, close to the price that Lu Yin cites for that year of 35.08 taels.⁴¹¹ Another quotation of 36 yuan per *liangma* in 1934 is also roughly consistent with an easing from the peak in 1928 that ran through the 1930s.

The overall picture was of increasing scarcity of domestic supply relative to demand. The Jiangxi trade appears to have declined severely by the 1930s, based on the records of the traditional Jiangxi merchant *bangs*. The precipitous decline of the Jiangxi trade was attributed to

⁴¹¹ Gan Fu, Gongcheng shijia.

the usual factors: natural disasters and banditry, which left the forests in disuse; competition from *yangsong*; and the price of *shanmu* relative to *yangsong*.⁴¹² The U.S. consul in Fuzhou reported that Fujianese timber had also been “rapidly increasing in price and more difficult to obtain, thus making possible the sale of more Oregon Pine.” The consul attributed higher prices to the need to go further inland for supplies.⁴¹³

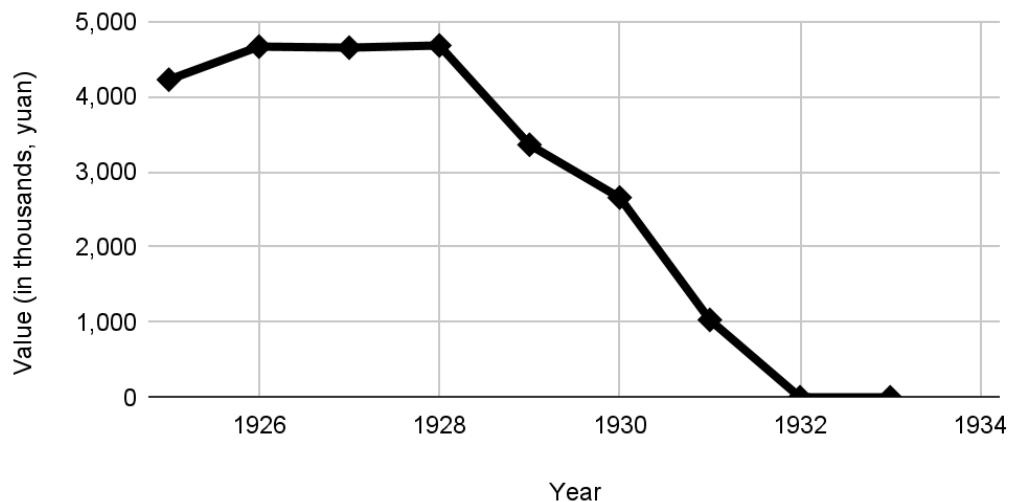
Figure 15: Price per Raft in Jiangxi



⁴¹² “Jiangxi zhi mucaiye,” Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang you guan muye diaocha ziliao 上海商业储蓄银行有关木业调查资料 Q275-001-01888, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

⁴¹³ “Foochow Pole Industry,” *The Timberman* (November 1928), 151.

Figure 16: Jiangxi Timber Volumes



Yangsong, despite the increases in the price of *shanmu*, remained the more expensive timber versus *shanmu* and Japanese timber on a simple price per raw volume basis. Price itself was not the only area of competition. Buyers also weighed the qualities of the lumber itself, and the ease of purchasing it in desired forms. In the following section, we will turn to a fuller spectrum of changes in China's timber consumption that created a more challenging environment for *shanmu*.

China's Global Timber Diet: Construction, Sales, Crafts and Taste

What space in the market for timber did *yangsong* occupy to justify the massive quantities of imports that flowed from the United States in the 1920s-1930s? The most price sensitive users stuck to *shanmu* and *songmu* and Japanese woods. Southeast Asian hardwoods like teak and Lauan from, which sold several times the price of *yangsong*, occupied an upper-market niche for interior ornamentation, paneling, fixtures, and furniture.

In this section, I will cover the different factors that came together to generate demand for *yangsong*. The new large-scale, multi-storey construction projects that grew out of the Shanghai skyline came with technical demands for timber piling and order volumes that domestic firms

were unlikely to have been capable of fulfilling with ease. The local builders of these large, showcase projects, as well as residential projects that were used by a growing proportion of Shanghai's population, learned to use standard U.S. lumber dimensions, and came to value the qualities of *yangsong* as a building material over the domestic timber that was available to them. More speculatively, the development of new tastes must have also played a part, as builders and architects came to associate domestic lumber with cheapness and flimsiness, while foreign timbers, among them expensive woods from Southeast Asia, were assigned qualities of longevity and elegance. There were other uses for foreign softwoods that will be discussed, such as for matches, packaging (caskets, barrels, etc), and shipbuilding. But at its core, the rise of *yangsong* as a competitor to *shanmu* in China's largest cities, and in particular Shanghai, was linked most closely to new large-scale construction projects, built by an agglomeration of foreign or foreign-inspired architects, engineers, and timber firms in the 1920s and 1930s.

The applications in which the replacement of *shanmu* with *yangsong* was easiest to explain were in areas like piling or wharf construction, where the demands for size and depth gave *yangsong* an insuperable advantage. Traditional construction in Shanghai did not require piles, despite the notoriously silty soil that lay underneath. It was the emergence of two to three story buildings with the treaty port era which introduced some demand for deep piles, though it appears that this demand could still be borne by domestic supply in the nineteenth century. The Second Trinity Church of Shanghai alone, built in the 1860s, consumed 6000 logs of Foochow pole.⁴¹⁴ A change seems to have come in the 1920s. New builds became taller and heavier, and short Foochow pole piles had become inadequate. Meanwhile, though different techniques and applications of concrete piling (meant to address concerns about rot in the exposed upper end of

⁴¹⁴ Hongbin Zheng, Yiting Pan and James W.P. Campbell, "Building on Shanghai Soil," *The Construction History Society* 34.1 (2019): 1-20.

the piles) were already known, these techniques were only starting to receive acceptance among engineers in Shanghai, and had yet to see extensive testing. They saw the fastest acceptance in applications like wharves and ports where timber was at high risk of rotting away, but full reinforced concrete piles were not used in Shanghai at all until 1925, when they were used for the Third Customs Building.⁴¹⁵ Even then, many applications of concrete in piling were in composites of some kind, with timber still part of the foundation's structure. This appeared to have been true for both the most modern structures, as well as ordinary constructions. A description of *yangsong* piling in *shikumen* apartments for example shows that the wooden piles were emplaced on a base of brick, concrete and stone.⁴¹⁶ Thus timber retained a role in this period when non-timber foundation technologies had yet to become fully mature.

The use of large dimension *yangsong* for piling was spurred on by its pricing and availability relative to domestic timber for the demands of new builds. An American engineer reported, consistent with the price data from the previous section, that Hankow poles and Foochow poles had simply become too expensive to use for piling at the scale we might have seen from a building akin to the Second Trinity Church.⁴¹⁷ Mr. G.A. Ganahl, who ran the Robert Dollar Corporation (*Dalai yanghang* 大来洋行) lumber desk for 36 years, also describes in accessible terms why the large wooden piles that only they could supply had become necessary for large, multi-story projects like offices:

“In China, and particularly in the Shanghai area, where the soil has been built up over thousands of years and there is no such thing as a rock bottom, no building can be built on this soil without being set on piling. The customary way of putting up an office

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Zhang Xuemin, *Shikumen lilong jianzhu yingzao jiyi* 石库门里弄建筑营造技艺, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2014), 56.

⁴¹⁷ E.J. Muller, “An Opinion on the Safest and Least Expensive Foundation Piling Adapted to Shanghai Conditions,” *The Far Eastern Review* 25.8 (Aug 1929), pp. 369-372.

building is to buy hundreds of pieces of piling, sometimes in 40 foot lengths or usually in 60 foot lengths, and driven very close together, say four feet apart each way so as to form an almost solid wooden base upon which to put their big concrete block, and upon which the building is to set.”⁴¹⁸

That is, the demand for piling timbers of this size at scale came with the introduction of new types of buildings in Shanghai: Heavy, multi-story skyscrapers, office buildings, and shopping centers that became new centers of Shanghainese social and work life, representing an increase of building consumption for people beyond their primary residence. Mr. G.A. Ganahl of the Dollar Lumber Corporation recalls that some of the biggest import orders they fulfilled were for piling timbers to be used for this purpose.⁴¹⁹ One of the historic orders that he discussed in detail was an order for the construction of the Wing-on Department Store Annex, at the intersection on Nanjing and Zhejiang Roads. The building, set to have 24 floors, was to be the second tallest building in Shanghai, housing five floors of sales space for the Wing-on Department Store, a roof garden, amusement space, a modern film theater, and office space for the company’s managing directors.⁴²⁰

The order for Wing-on required the delivery of 2400 lumber piles 60 feet tall, and a minimum 8 inch circumference at the top of the pile (for reference, timber poles over 30 feet tall would have been considered most extraordinary—not to mention expensive—even for Douglas Fir trees, and it was common to “staple” two 30 foot tall piles together to save money). Dollar called up their best suppliers, who had access to the Renton-Mount Si logging districts in the outskirts of

⁴¹⁸ “Inspection and Grading Rules: Douglas Fir Piling,” Carton 15, Lumber Operations: Manuscript of Lumber Operations Prepared by Mr. G.A. Ganahl, Robert Dollar Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ “24-Story Wing On Tower Ready: Shanghai’s Tallest Building Will Be Opened Soon,” *The China Press* (1925-1938), (31 Mar 1937): B51.

Seattle, and other logging districts with the right environmental conditions to produce logs with a certain taper to meet the grade required for piling. Only international firms like Dollar with access to suppliers in the right logging areas could have delivered this unique of an order at short notice in large, consistent volumes. Lumber and other wood products constituted a dominant proportion of the outbound tonnage from the U.S. Pacific Northwest to Asia, followed by other goods like wheat flour, and scrap steel. Return voyages were harder to fill with products from China, and so they were buoyed with bulky products from the Philippine islands such as hardwood, copra (made from coconut), and soybean products. See for example two representative shipping manifests on vessels that traveled between various ports in East Asia and Seattle, in Tables 17 and 18.

TABLE 17: Outbound Manifest for a Tacoma-Oriental Vessel, 1930			
Commodity	Tons	Revenue	Percent of Total
Ammonia - Sulphite	35.7	167.75	0.014
Cattle	0	0	0.000
Copper	430.1	1951.08	0.174
Explosives	0	0	0.000
Fire Brick	0	0	0.000
Fish	1057	7761.37	0.428
Flour	23,914.10	116,041.87	9.679
Lead - Pig	606.2	2495.7	0.245
Logs - Piling/Ties/Poles	25,821.70	95426.45	10.451
Lumber	169,348	449,577.26	68.540
Machinery	0	0	0.000
Milk - Canned	122.3	1288.71	0.049
Newspaper - Old	405.9	2027.4	0.164
Newsprint	1515.3	13011.14	0.613

Provisions	0	0	0.000
Rubber - Scrap	72.1	612.53	0.029
Soda - Caustic	0	0	0.000
Steel - Scrap	5855.5	20,354.37	2.370
Wheat	685	20,386.35	0.277
Wood Pulp	194.8	633.57	0.079
Zinc - Pig	381	40417.96	0.154
Cargo N.O.S.	16,634	40417.96	6.732
"Commodities Outbound," MSS 69/113, Carton 54, Tacoma Oriental 1934-1952, Robert Dollar Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.			

TABLE 18: Inbound Manifest for a Tacoma-Oriental Vessel, 1930			
COMMODITY	Tons	Revenue	Percent of Total
Alcohol	0	0	0.00
Bristles	107.4	651	0.14
Canned Goods	0	0	0.00
Coconut - Dessicated	765.9	4191.14	1.01
Copra - Cord/Meal/Oil	11,397.00	64,899.99	15.01
Cotton	1156.9	4021.94	1.52
Egg Yolks and Albumen	580.5	2690.71	0.76
Empty Drums	152.1	1721	0.20
(illegible)	34.8	100.57	0.05
(illegible)	309.5	1885.81	0.41
Hemp	829.1	7599.62	1.09
Lumber - Hardwood	16,549.20	91,864.12	21.80
Oyster Shells	0	0	0.00
Peanut Cake - Meal	2,967.20	15,056.38	3.91
Peanuts - Shelled	3,627.50	11,690.74	4.78

Peanuts - Unshelled	3,187.20	16,488.98	4.20
Pineapple - Canned	0	0	0.00
Seeds	4669.3	15,772.53	6.15
Silk & Silk Waste	274.7	4,989.34	0.36
Skins and Hides	203.2	931.19	0.27
Soya Beans - Cake/Meal/Oil	14,380.30	38,128.85	18.94
Spices	372.7	2035.07	0.49
“Commodities Inbound,” MSS 69/113, Carton 54, Tacoma Oriental 1934-1952, Robert Dollar Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.			

Builders also became partial to yangsong for general construction use, outside of piling. A manual for constructing the new “economic home” (*jingji zhuzhai*) states that for rooms that were no more than 12 feet wide, *shanmu* beams were sufficient. For anything wider, *yangsong* was preferred. Builders in the interior for whom *yangsong* was less available in the market were advised to simply find other suitable materials.⁴²¹ *Yangsong* was used widely in cement formwork/casing. Though it has not been written about much in the sources I have examined, brief comments from builders suggest its use was probably widespread, which would make sense if *yangsong* was valued for its shape retention, as formworks can be re-used to save money.⁴²² A writer in the journal *Yingzao* stated for example that *yangsong* was indispensable for this specific use (*fei yangsong bu cheng* 非洋松不成).⁴²³ Construction manuals or regulations might also list *yangsong* for cement formwork specifically among materials lists, or name it specifically as a material for use, though the reason for the preference is left unsaid.⁴²⁴ A reader (likely a foreign

⁴²¹ Xu Xintang 徐鑫堂, *Jingji zhuzhai* 经济住宅, (Shanghai: Hequn shangye yinshua suo 合群商业印刷所, 1933), 42.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Xu Juncheng 徐駿成, “Yangsong 洋松,” *Yingzao* 营造 3 (1943): 41.

⁴²⁴ Xue Cixin 薛次莘, *Fangwu* 房屋, (Shanghai, Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1934), P74.

engineer in Shanghai), responding to an article on Chinese carpentry which claimed that China could potentially source all of its timber domestically, thinking of the applications where *yangsong* was least replaceable, brought up the question of how China could possibly replace Douglas Fir for decking, deep piling, and shuttering (i.e. cement formwork). That is to say, cement formwork was probably one area where available substitutes to *yangsong* were rarely accepted by foreign builders in Shanghai.⁴²⁵

Less standardized and lower quality types of foreign timber were used in China as well, though less in construction, and more for manufacturing. Siberian pines introduced to the market somewhat later, and known to have inconsistent batch quality went into applications like box packaging.⁴²⁶ American timber also competed for low-end industrial niches, though *yangsong* itself was not always the main competing product. Dollar Lumber Co. cornered the market for matchsticks in Shanghai with 8-10 million feet a year of cottonwood imports, representing a 40-50% share.⁴²⁷ Engineered products like plywood (*sanjiaban* 三夹板) by this time have also made an entry in interior applications and furnitures, where carpenters found it a great convenience.⁴²⁸ These were also used by domestic firms for consumer packaging like tea boxes.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ A. Emms, "The Practice of Joinery and Carpentry amongst the Chinese of the Yangtze Valley," *Engineering Society of China* (1937): 1-78; Du Yangeng 杜彦耿, "Gongcheng gujia (baxu) (futubiao): Muzuo gongcheng 工程估价(八续)(附图表): 木作工程," *Jianzhu yuekan* 1.9/10 第1卷 第9/10期 (1933): 104-109.

⁴²⁶ Smith, *China and Indo-China*, 7-36.

⁴²⁷ Their main customers were China Match Co., American Far Eastern Match Co. Grand Match Co. Dollar Carton 15. "Letter from G.A. Ganahl, Seattle Office, 1951" Carton 15, Lumber Operations: Manuscript of Lumber Operations Prepared by Mr. G.A. Ganahl, Robert Dollar Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.

⁴²⁸ Du Yangeng 杜彦耿, "Gongcheng gujia (baxu) (futubiao): Muzuo gongcheng 工程估价(八续)(附图表): 木作工程," *Jianzhu yuekan* 1.9/10 第1卷 第9/10期 (1933): 104-109.

⁴²⁹ SHMA, A66-1-182-5.

Ultimately, *yangsong*'s edge over *shanmu* in construction was not in its material qualities or its larger dimensions, but its higher degree of commodification, with large batches of uniform product that could be obtained easily. The delivery of large orders at speed was enabled by some measure of industrial coordination by firms in the United States. The Douglas Fir Exploitation and Export Corporation, a combination of logging and milling firms in the Pacific Northwest, made specifically to coordinate lumber exports, regularly sent out orders and requests from China and Japan for inventory reports from its members. They also pressed members to make timely deliveries to the ports. This was a major selling point for importers like *Xiangtai muhang*, which boasted in its advertisements on the construction journal *Jiangzhu yuekan* that it prepared big batches regularly (常备大宗).⁴³⁰

The *yangsong* that entered into the Shanghai market was graded into classes with uniform batch qualities—into knot-free No. 1 grade boards separated from No. 2 grade boards—and obtained pre-cut in dimensions that came into wide use among Shanghai carpenters. *Shanmu*, which usually had to be processed on the building site, generated waste from flaws in the unprocessed timber, and the difficulty of getting as many of the cuts that builders actually needed out of the rounds.

Because of this difference between the two products in the market, price series between *shanmu* in traditional *liangma* measures, and *yangsong* in board feet, were not in fact comparable. There was some loss involved in converting *shanmu* in boards and beams. That said, a rare builder's manual from a Shanghai cotton mill gives us rough rules of thumb for figuring how many board feet can be obtained from *shanmu* rounds: *Hangmu* (timber from Hangzhou, ultimately sourced from Zhejiang and Anhui) yielded 500 board feet per *liangma*, *ximu* (from Jiangxi) yielded 600 board feet per *liangma*, and *guangmu* (from Hunan and

⁴³⁰ See the advertisement of Xiangtai Muhang in the opening pages of *Jianzhu yuekan* 1.2 (1932).

Guizhou) yielded 700 board feet per liangma of round logs after sawing.⁴³¹ By these converted measures, we see that yangsong truly was cheaper than *xihumu* for a short period in the late 1920s, as illustrated in Figure 13. The superiority of American lumber as a product in terms of convenience for builders who did not want to do on-site processing was also observed by a researcher studying Manchurian timber in the 1920s. In line with what Shanghai builders stated in their manuals and journals, he claimed that because Manchurian timber was still processed using traditional methods into non-standard sizes and measures, and took a lot of time and labor to re-process, builders preferred to simply buy foreign products out of convenience.⁴³²

Thus, beyond convenience, the higher degree of commodification was more economical for builders. The inconsistency of lumber sawn out from *shanmu* thus imposed an extra cost for builders. Building contracts could make stringent specifications on wood quality, demanding that knotted or flawed woods be disposed of during construction. For floorboards, in particular, *yangsong* bought in tongue-and-groove boards, marketed as *qikouban* 企口板 in builder's journals, were far easier to install, even for unskilled workers. These reduced the needs for laborers, and for skill.⁴³³ Together, the ease of purchasing large, consistent batches of lumber that can be readily drawn on in the construction site, and its convenience of use, overcame any concerns about the price of *yangsong* in their eyes. *Shanmu* was “especially hard to use, and when you calculate the final value of the two [*shanmu* and *yangsong*], *shanmu* was actually more

⁴³¹ 木材材积计算表, Q193-001-02518, 申新纺织厂总管理处关于建筑工程工料估价计算等手册, SHMA P56.

⁴³² Chi Xiang, “Chinese Resource Modernity,” 246-247, 241.

⁴³³ Xue Cixin 薛次莘, *Fangwu* 房屋, (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1933), 48.

expensive than *yangsong*, by far.”⁴³⁴ This confirms what converted *yangsong* prices based on a carpenter’s rules of thumb tell us about the economies of pre-cut foreign lumber.

The process of getting highly commodified American lumber to be accepted by builders in China, especially in the dimensions that they produced, is not completely transparent. It was not a given that they would be readily accepted. The market for imported lumber in China notably diverged from Japan (the other major export market for Pacific Northwest lumber), which remained primarily a market for squares. 1x4 and 1x6 dimensions simply did not sell there, to the point that a Red Cross delivery in non-Japanese dimensions amidst the rebuilding effort after the Kanto earthquake was said to have been rejected.⁴³⁵ Robert Dollar reported that China also used to be a market which primarily imported “long American timber,” and had to work to make a market for processed timber.⁴³⁶

Eventually, dimensions like 1x6 inch or 1x4 inch became popular for flooring. 1x6 inch *yangsong* boards in particular became standard use in later (*houqi*) *lilong* residential constructions. Modern steam-powered mills owned by domestic firms that processed *shanmu* were available at least since 1906, but they still could not compete with the ready availability of *yangsong* in large volumes.⁴³⁷ *Songmu* products sourced from Kaihua, Huabu, Longyou,

⁴³⁴ The quote reads as follows: “...殊難應用, 核算二者至價值, 杉木實高昂於洋松遠甚。” See “Jiangxi zhi mucai ye,” *Jingji xunkan*, 4.7 經濟旬刊 第四卷 第七期, in “Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang you guan muye diaocha ziliao 上海商业储蓄银行有关木业调查资料,” Q275-001-01888, SHMA.

⁴³⁵ “The Barkentine: Janet Dollar,” Carton 15, Lumber Operations: Manuscript of Lumber Operations Prepared by Mr. G.A. Ganahl, Robert Dollar Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.

⁴³⁶ Dollar, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 316-317.

⁴³⁷ See following article, which states that even as new modern mills were set up to produce squares in Fuzhou by 1940, these still could not beat *yangsong* in terms of sheer volume. As best as we can tell, domestic mills, even as they produced *qikouban* and other modern products, were composed of a large number of small operations. Xin Yuanjue 忻元爵, Timber Price Changes in the Shanghai Market; Du Yangeng 杜彦耿, “Gongcheng gujia (xu) (fu tubiao) 工程估价(续)(附图表),” *Jianzhu yuekan* 1.2 (1932): 13-18; Wang Shaozhou 王绍周 and Chen Zhimin 陈志敏, *Lilong jianzhu* 里弄建筑, (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 1987), 89-91.

Hangzhou and other counties, marketed as *Hangban* (“Hangzhou board”) were available on the market as milled products. Wenzhounese timber was also available on the market as competition, often at prices that were slightly cheaper than *yangsong*.⁴³⁸

The common projects in which *yangsong* replaced *shanmu* and *songmu* were *lilong* (rowhouse) apartments and other denser forms of residential and commercial buildings. By sheer numbers the emergence of the *lilong* was the largest change in the Shanghai urban landscape and housing conditions for the Shanghai population between the late-Qing and the establishment of the People’s Republic. Defined broadly to encompass apartment blocks, terraces, old-style *lilong*, and new-style (*xinshi*) *lilong*, they comprised over 60% of Shanghai’s total housing stock by the beginning of the PRC. They gave shelter to the new social units that formed Shanghai - no longer the traditional multi-generational families, but small nuclear families and single workers who might be thought of as part of an emerging “middle class” that demanded respectable housing at a low price.⁴³⁹

New-style *lilong*, also called late-period (*houqi*) *lilong* built from the 1910s onward adopted new building techniques and materials that set them apart from older constructions. Structurally, they were defined by the increased adoption of load-bearing brick walls, no longer the non-load bearing “curtain” walls of traditional buildings. The stone entrance arches (the *shikumen*) displayed more elaborate Western-inspired embellishments, while the interiors included “modern” amenities that were seen as minimum criteria for a respectable household: toilets, separate kitchens, and so on. Materially, in addition to the introduction of concrete and steel, *yangsong* also displaced *shanmu* in both structural and non-structural applications. This was

⁴³⁸ Du Yangeng 杜彦耿, “Gongcheng gujia (baxu) (futubiao): Muzuo gongcheng.” See also the regular quotations on construction material prices in *Jianzhu yuekan*, where Hangzhou board timber quotations are always included.

⁴³⁹ Luo Suwen 罗苏文, *Shikumen: xunchang renjia* 石库门: 寻常人家, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), 3-38.

from the invisible structural elements like pilings and beams, down to the stairs, and floorboards, which turned to using standardized tongue-and-groove boards available in the market.⁴⁴⁰ One blueprint for a three-floor home from a 1933 collection of “economic residences” (*jingji zhuzhai*) for example states that aside from roofing, all non-cement floors and window framings were to use *yangsong* as the primary material.⁴⁴¹

Qualitative Dimensions and Social Distinction

While the economies from buying large volumes of graded and processed lumber was likely the main advantage of *yangsong* in projects, it did not stop builders from turning around and assigning qualities that made it a materially superior wood to *shanmu*. Fuzhou *songban* and Fuzhou *shanmu* were thought by builders to be the worst of the domestic varieties, which could not compete beyond price. It was said to absorb a lot of moisture and warp easily. Even when sent to modern processing mills like those of China Import & Export Lumber, it ended up being used for box shooks. Even the best among domestic *shanmu* was considered only good enough for “cheap” traditional homes.⁴⁴² *Xihumu* from Hunan and Guizhou, considered the top class among the domestic pole timbers, was described as solid but knotty.⁴⁴³ Machine-sawn Hangzhou *songban* (*hangsongban*), on the other hand, was described as comparable to *yangsong* boards in terms of the basic temperament of the wood. Indeed, *yangsong* was considered worse in some aspects. It was said to shrink, and bump out in high moisture conditions, and builders have to compensate by purchasing wider dimensions for floorboards. To *yangsong*’s advantage, it was assigned qualities of hardness and durability relative to *songban*. This quality mattered not just

⁴⁴⁰ Zhang Xuemin, *Shikumen lilong*, 54-57.

⁴⁴¹ Xu Xintang 徐鑫堂, *Jingji zhuzhai* 经济住宅, (Shanghai: Hequn shangye yinshua suo 合群商业印刷所, 1933), 126.

⁴⁴² J.H. Free, “Interesting Phases of Lumbering in China,” *The Timberman* (Nov 1920), 36-37.

⁴⁴³ Lu Yin 芦隐, “Shiliao Zhuanji: Nanjing Shangxinhe Muyezhi 史料专辑:南京上新河木业志,” *Muyezhi* 1.1 (1940): 7-10.

for the peace of mind of the residents and the builders on the structural solidity of the building, but also for making these buildings pleasant to inhabit. In the multi-storey buildings of the time, *shanmu* floorboards were thought to make “creaking” (*gezhi gezhi* 咯吱咯吱) sounds, while the tongue-and-groove *yangsong* boards, by contrast, were thought to be quieter. The new boards were also thought to be better for preventing seepage of dust and other materials.⁴⁴⁴

Beyond structural uses, where the wood was invisible to visitors to a home, *yangsong* (in particular the more expensive grades) occupied a niche together with the hardwoods teak and Lauan (*liu'an* 柳安) as aesthetically pleasing woods for interiors. The reason why *yangsong* was considered more aesthetically pleasing is unclear, but many contemporaries thought of it in positive terms relative to *shanmu*, describing the wood as more attractive, more elegant.⁴⁴⁵ Yangsong was described as having a more pleasant grain. The hardwoods like Lauan and teak had a more visible advantage in this aspect. Lauan, a hardwood imported by Dollar Lumber from the Philippines, was described as having few imperfections and a grain that made it more beautiful than *yangsong*. Others described it as being soft and easy to work with for interiors, with knots exceedingly rare.⁴⁴⁶

The most expensive and prized variety among these imported hardwoods was *laohong* Lauan - describing an old, very hard wood, with a deep red color. Other prized hardwoods that were imported from the Philippines included Ipil-Ipil and Guijo. These could go for many times the per board foot price of No. 1 merchantable *yangsong* in China, which was the dominant

⁴⁴⁴ Chen and Wang, *Lilong jianzhu*, 89-95; Zhang, *Shikumen lilong*, 54-57.

⁴⁴⁵ Lu Yin 芦隐, “Shiliao Zhuanji: Nanjing Shangxinhe Muye zhi,” Yang Guoji 杨国标, “Zhongwai mucai zhi bijiao ji pinping 中外木材之比较及品评,” *Jingji huibao* 经济会报 2.2 (1923). Many other writers casually remark on the relative beauty of *yangsong* versus domestic lumber, though they rarely get into much detail as to why. See for example Xue, *Fangwu*; Wu, “Gongshang diaocha: Wuhan zhi mucai ye 工商调: 武汉之木材业.”

⁴⁴⁶ “The Market for Lumber in South China,” *The Timberman* (March 1919): 82.

destination for Philippine export hardwoods.⁴⁴⁷ Prices of over 200 per tbf would be typical (though some varieties like Singapore Lauan can be closer to parity with yangsong).⁴⁴⁸ Cheaper Lauans go from lighter reds, to yellows, then (the cheapest) whites. Both *yangsong* and Lauan were thus sought and used mainly in middle to upper class homes, where they served as markers of social distinction, a sign of a household that was in healthy financial condition (*you churu* 有出入).⁴⁴⁹

Foreign timbers like *yangsong* and Lauan were not explicitly associated with descriptions of the “modern home” in essays, novels, or advertisements—homes that were outfitted with modern baths, kitchens, living rooms, Western-style furniture, and new “hygienic” layouts that allowed air to circulate and sunlight to shine in. I have so far only been able to gather what builders thought *yangsong* represented for those who will eventually inhabit the homes they built. Their manuals mention that certain woods like No. 1 *yangsong* boards would be used for middle to upper class homes, while No. 2 would be reserved for “ordinary” (*putong*) homes.⁴⁵⁰ Consumers by contrast have not articulated for themselves what social demonstrative value the imported timbers had. *Yangsong* simply sat quietly in plain text between illustrated advertisements for the essentials of the new, modern home, just as they hid in the background of the new-style buildings from the 1910s onward: In floorboards, doorframes, beams, posts, and the very foundations of the buildings that remade the face of Shanghai.

⁴⁴⁷ John A. Fowler, *Lumber Industry of the Philippine Islands: With Special Reference to Export Species*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925).

⁴⁴⁸ See the regular construction material price lists from Jianzhu yuekan. You can also find quotations in other publications like Gan Fu, “Gongcheng lingshi: Zuijin Shanghai gongcheng cailiao shijia biao (shiyue di ciao cha: mucai) 工程零拾：最近上海工程材料市價表(十月底調查),” *Hehai zhoubao* 15.6 河海周报 (1921): 9-21; Yang, “Zhongwai mucai.”

⁴⁴⁹ Xue, *Fangwu*, 48.

⁴⁵⁰ Xu, *Jingji zhuzhai*, 42.

Table 19: Advertisements in Jianzhu Yuekan 1.9/10 (1933), 143-	
Great Eastern Steel Window 大東剛窗公司	Steel Windows
Zhongguo Tongtie Gongchang 中國銅鐵工廠	Steel Windows
Wahson and Co. Electric Factory 華生電器製造廠	Electric Fans
The World Furnishing Co.	Western-style Furniture
Yizhong fuji 益中福記	Glazed Ceramic Tiles and Bricks
Xin Kee and Company 新仁記營造廠	Construction
Zhongguo Zaomu Youxian Gongsi 中國造木有限公司	Lumber processing
The Universal Engineering Co. 有利洋行	Plumbing and Heating
Rongtai Tongtie Fanshachang 榮泰銅鐵翻砂廠	Tubing/Downpipes, Drainage, Fittings
Citroen	Trucks
Demag Duisburg	Block and Tackle
Zhang Dexing Dianliaohang 張德行電料行	Electricals
Robert Dollar Co. 大來洋行	Oregon Pine (yangsong) piling, lumber, Kiln-Treated Philippine Lauan, Window and Door Frames
Biaozhunpai Dengpao 標準牌燈泡	Electric Light Bulbs
The China Import and Export Lumber Co. – Flooring Department 祥泰木行有限公司地板部	Machine-cut Wooden Floorboards
Yuan Feng Corporation 元丰公司	Anti-corrosive Paints
The China Wire Products Co. 中国制钉股份有限公司	Nails and Cables

Dollar Dissolves Malthus: The Impact of Lumber Imports on China's Economy

The large-scale arrival of foreign timber on China's coastal cities represented more than just a case of American dumping of cheap goods to the ruin of domestic industry, as contemporaries

at the time tended to describe it. The emergence of *yangsong* and other foreign timbers as mainstream materials for building, packaging, and manufacturing in Shanghai represented a potential turning point in China's economic growth, industrialization, and urbanization. The size and density of its cities and commercial activity would face, for the moment, one less constraint to their continued growth, with ready access to timber at scale beyond what domestic production can easily supply in large quantities without taxing builders and traders with higher prices.⁴⁵¹

The historical experience of Shanghai and other coastal cities in China shares a kinship with those of other areas that were part of trans-Pacific shipping routes after the First World War. Asuka Yamaguchi, representing the latest research on Japan's timber market, has shown how the rapid industrialization, urbanization, and household formation in Japan increased demand far beyond the government's expectations of what domestic production, even after the Meiji reforestation programs, could supply.⁴⁵² The government's hand was forced, and tariffs for U.S. timbers were eliminated by 1919. By 1921, Japan flipped into being a net importer of timber. Tokyo in particular became very dependent on imported timber. In the 1920s, about a third of its supplies came from places outside the home islands, mainly the U.S., and for a few years, Karafuto. This dependence on imports only increased in crises like the post-Kanto earthquake rebuilding, when Tokyo and Yokohama's import dependence spiked to around half.⁴⁵³ On a micro-level, the reasons why Japanese builders adopted U.S. timber also shared a lot with Shanghai's story. Contractors could not buy 20 foot timbers in large volumes without paying a

⁴⁵¹ On how international trade helps break the Malthusian land constraint, see Kevin O'Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson, "From Malthus to Ohlin: Trade, Industrialisation and Distribution Since 1500," *Journal of Economic Growth* 10 (2005): 5-34.

⁴⁵² Yamaguchi Asuka 山口明日香, *Shinrin Shiryō no Kankyō Keizaishi: Kindai Nihon no Sangyōka to Mokuzai* 森林資料の環境経済史：近代日本の産業化と木材 [The Economic History of Forests: Modern Japan's Industrialization and Timber], (Tōkyō: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2015).

⁴⁵³ Yamaguchi, *Shinrin Shiryō*, 46.

premium, and they used American timber heavily for piling, ports, and frameworks. Domestic timber was restricted to interior works.⁴⁵⁴ The fundamental factors that generated the surge in U.S. timber imports in the two decades after the First World War thus seem to be shared: Excess American capacity made Pacific Northwest timber cheap to cut, mill and ship. Industrialization and urbanization in East Asia's largest cities created demand for timber that domestic supplies could no longer shoulder without difficulty. In the middle, merchants like Robert Dollar worked to realize a new trade relationship between these two ends of the Pacific, relieving resource constraints in East Asia by tapping into the surplus of the New World.

Figure 16: Lumber Shipments from the United States

⁴⁵⁴ Eden Arthur Shand, "The Development of the Japanese Market for Pacific Northwest Lumber: A Historical Survey," (M.B.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1968), 52-59.

A clipping from *The Timberman* showing how large a lumber shipment of 4 million feet looked like. This shipment of lumber was to be dropped onto Nanjing, the old heart of the Yangzi



Here is how a cargo of four million feet looks all in one pile, as it was assembled for the steamer *Grace Dollar*, which loaded it in November from the J. R. Harvey Dock in Portland. The ties are all 6x9 — 8 feet, forming a pile on the dock sixty-four feet wide, seven hundred and fifty feet long, and fourteen feet high. The material was arranged in sling loads of forty pieces each. The cargo was supplied by J. R. Harvey and shipped for the account of Dant & Russell, Inc., of Portland. The destination was Pukow, China. Shipping men paid Mr. Harvey a high compliment for the excellent shape in which the cargo was assembled.

river timber market. *The Timberman*, Dec 1923, 113.

The Sinews Degrade: Southeastern Guizhou amidst the Globalization of the Timber Market

The *shanmu* that flowed down in great numbers from the Qingshui river for over two centuries was not spared from the damage wrought by American exports. While it did not decline as precipitously as the Jiangxi trade, it suffered from the same market environment that exporters in Fujian, Manchuria, and other timber producing areas faced, of lower volumes offset by higher prices. Still, the impact of these changes, together with the wider set of social, political and economic changes over the Republic, was mediated by the specific conditions of the Qingshui river region. Here we will examine briefly what became of the social order that we have documented so far in this environment, within the constraints of the more limited primary sources of the time.

The decline and disappearance of the Qing and its magistrates created a re-arrangement of markets in the Qingshui river basin. These changes came in multiple forms and timelines, some more gradual, some more dramatic. Most damaging to *shanke* elites and their maintenance was the much diminished environment for making profits from arbitrage from the late Qing onwards.

Prohibitions on merchant border crossings did not simply disappear in the late Qing. As late as 1896, we have a record of the Liping magistrate writing a proclamation affirming the custom prohibiting *yuejiang*. It cites a petition written by the *shanke* merchant Jiang Lichuan 姜利川 (possibly referring to a *shanke* merchant from Ping'ao hamlet).⁴⁵⁵ The petition reads as follows:

“The upriver *shanke* cannot rush through the river and sell [their timber directly to *shuik*]. Downstream merchants are not allowed to *yuejiang* and fight to purchase [timber directly from timberland owners]...who dares violate these on purpose? In recent years,

⁴⁵⁵ Lichuan is a name of a Guangxu-era timber brand (*yinhao*) in the Qingshui river basin owned by Jiang Peiqing 姜沛清 of Jiachi hamlet. It is possible that this is simply the name that Jiang Peiqing took for the petition.

among the sanjiang *hanghu*, there are many who take the downstream timber merchant's silver, and go upriver to make proxy purchases for the downstream merchants. The *shanke*'s capital [*ziben*] is limited. Who is able to add to their prices and fight with them to purchase? Hence the *shanke*, in the past two to three years have filed cases in the yamen. The upriver [merchants] vary in their wisdom and stupidity, and cannot distinguish the real [real non-proxy offers], causing the *hanghu* who serve as proxies for guest merchants to be greater and greater in number...the mountains and valleys have been exhausted completely...Furthermore, on the intent of establishing the *jianghang*, how can such actions be allowed? Upwards, from deep in the mountains and valleys, downwards to Jiangnan and Shanghai, profits now all accrue to the downstream merchants.⁴⁵⁶

This petition suggests that there is continuity with the problems that emerged after the Xian-Tong rebellion that we saw in Chapter 4. Capital from outside was beginning to seep through the barriers set up by Qing rule. The conduits were still the *hanghu*. But the sources of capital were no longer just domestic merchants, but also the compradors of foreign merchants, mainly the Japanese firms Mitsui and Mitsubishi, who entered the market for timber in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War in 1896. These were called the *huabang* in the vernacular, because they originally dealt in the Hankow-based cotton and cotton cloth trade, but expanded into the timber trade as a seasonal, complementary line.

The entry of the *huabang* into the market was not a long-lasting phenomenon. They were a major force only until 1911. However, they do represent the fundamental challenge that the traditional *jianggui* system faced from the late-Qing onwards. Hanghu brokers were being used as proxies, making the Qingshui river market more permeable than it was before. The effects on

⁴⁵⁶ JPLB, 42.

the competitive position of the *shanke* were exacerbated by the large amounts of capital that proxy merchants could bring into the market, bleeding the competition out, and earning market share. At their peak the huabang were thought to have been responsible for 80% of annual trading volumes.⁴⁵⁷

Other rival firms also appeared. The aspiring brokerage towns downstream of border in Tianzhu county seized on the collapse of the Qing in 1911 to “monopolize and occupy” (*bazhan* 霸占) the ports and rafts of the customary brokerage towns, which held privileged positions in the timber market since the Yongzheng conquest. The upstream *shanke* and the incumbents bitterly fought these actions by lobbying the upper levels of the new Republican government of Guizhou province. However, the division of Liping prefecture into several new districts in 1914, among them Jinping county, diluted the influence of the brokerage elites versus Tianzhu county, which was now far larger than the new Jinping county, and was supported by downstream timber merchants. The new arrangement of the timber market was thus made under the provincial Civil Affairs Bureau (*minzhengting*), and through the consultation of a joint conference of Jinping and Tianzhu county chambers of commerce and *hanghu*. The decision kept some protections for the old customary brokerages of the Qing, but established a new market environment that permitted outside merchants to operate from the competing brokerage towns and purchase upriver timber through their mediation. While the system was never watertight, and was already challenged by the late-Qing, this declaration finally marked the formal end of over two centuries of “unwritten law” (*bucheng wenfa*) that kept the sanjiang villages the center of the timber trade. In this environment, new firms arose to challenge the *sanjiang hanghu*. New trading guilds in particular began to grow in strength and number in Tianzhu county, opposite of Jinping, based in the

⁴⁵⁷ DSLD, 34.

waisanjiang brokerage towns like Benchu. These Tianzhunese firms continued eating away at the dominance of local firms after the departure of the *huabang*.⁴⁵⁸

As we have seen in the previous section, on the macro-level, there was an unimpeachable decline in trading volumes for Yangzi river timber, partly due to competition from foreign timber. This can be seen in scattered remarks on the relative size of the trade over time, and the business activities of firms that previously dealt only in domestic *shanmu*. Wu Zhonglun tells us that volumes in Nanjing's *Shangxinhe* market dropped from around 10 million yuan in 1924, to 5 million yuan in 1928, 2.3 million yuan in 1930, and 1.1 million yuan by 1931. Lu Yin, in his piece *Nanjing shangxinhe muyezhi* 南京上新河木业志, roughly concurs with this assessment – of volumes previously on the order of 10 million yuan, but dropping below that since.

These dramatic declines in volumes and recollections of poor market conditions for *shanmu* coincided with the time that G.A. Ganahl recalled was the peak of the Dollar lumber import business. Ganahl wrote in a letter to Robert Dollar that 1934 was their record year, when their firm alone sold 171 million feet of lumber—worth at least 8 million haikwan taels, and certainly overshadowing by this point the size of the Yangzi river timber trade. Dollar's competitor Ma Jiliang, who ran Kaitai Muhao (a firm that dealt mainly in Fujian timber imported by ship to Shanghai) noted by contrast that 1932-1933 was a time when China's domestic timber industry was in the midst of “mad winds and violent rains (*kuang feng bao yu*).” He attributed these struggles to the Shanghai Incident of 1932, and more generally the rise of concrete, steel, and yangsong as alternative materials in the construction market. Though he attempts to project confidence by claiming that Chinese timber was far superior in quality to American timber, one could sense that Ma was writing from a position of weakness, appealing to both consumers and government ministers to advance the “national goods” (*guohuo*) movement in timber.

⁴⁵⁸ Wang Zongxun, *Maoping*, 96-98.

However, the distribution of the decline was not even, and lower volumes were compensated for by higher prices. Though the evidence is difficult to come by (by the admission of contemporaries who actually had access to timber merchants, overall statistics cannot be found, and the best estimate was still the *lijin*), the Guizhou-Hunan segment of the timber market appears to have fared better than its competitors in this downturn.⁴⁵⁹ Zhang Xiaomei in his text *Guizhou Jingji* reckons, impressionistically, that the Qingshui river trade remained at around 6 million yuan a year in trading volume in the 1930s before the Japanese invasion, after which it dropped to just a million yuan a year. Looking back to the recollections of the local merchants Liao Yaonan and You Zhisheng, they claim that production from around 1922 to 1936 was around six million *dayang yuan* per year.⁴⁶⁰

More specific and better informed estimates show that Hunan-Guizhou timber diverged from national trends in the timber market of lower unit volumes. Trading volume for Hunan-Guizhou *shanmu* thus appears to have peaked at the same time with *yangsong* and the U.S. lumber import trade. 1934 (the same year that Ganahl of Dollar Lumber thought the U.S. lumber import trade peaked) was cited as the time when Hunanese timber exports were at their very peak. In that year, volumes for Miao timber were thought to have reached 7 million yuan.⁴⁶¹ This contradicts another account, which claims that trading volumes in Parrot Island, near Hankou—the closest proxy for the *xihumu* market—declined from 8-9 million yuan a year of business in the 1920s to only 4-5 million yuan of business by 1933-1934, with about 2 million yuan worth of timber going further downstream.⁴⁶² Nevertheless, this shows that if there was any displacement from

⁴⁵⁹ See “Hankow zhi mucai maoyi,” on how records were difficult to come by.

⁴⁶⁰ GWZL, 105.

⁴⁶¹ *Hunan shiye zhi*, 411-413.

⁴⁶² Wu Xiyan, “Gongshang diaocha: Wuhan zhi mucaiye,” 75-78. The Baishazhou volumes are mainly a proxy for *donghumu* [“East lake timber,” that is from east of Dongting lake] volume, not Hunan and the Yuan river volume. Much of this timber also went into local Wuhan market consumption, not re-exports to other markets.

yangsong imports, it hit other regions harder, and the problems in the Qingshui river timber trade did not come from the top line, which demonstrated rough continuity with the late Qing—just as the contracts suggest.

Other scattered evidence suggests that the timber business as a whole was in fact holding up well in the Qingshui river basin. A small survey of representative (*dianxing*) households in Kuidan village suggests that incomes from timber pulling and cultivation held up, including for households that still had a hold on land, became larger in the early 1930s. The Kuidan households of Wang Shishun and Wang Qingfu, both representing “lower middle peasants” (*xia zhong nong*) in the 1930s, derived 38.7% and 89.4% of their household incomes from timber pulling and timber cultivation in the early-1930s, higher than what the broader surveys in Kuidan would have indicated for people of their economic standing at a later period.

Meanwhile, around the same time, we see signals from downstream in Hunan, as a proxy for the broader Yuanjiang timber export market, that the trade was in good health. The number of firms holding officially approved *yatie* grew in number, and what little is known about taxation figures, tell us that the trade may even have grown, at least after 1928. Still, even as workers and downstream merchants generally did well in this time, and gave us the impression of a lively regional timber market, the *shanke* in the middle, as far as we can tell, experienced this period quite differently. With the abolishing of market entry restrictions for *shuike*, and the deepening linkages between *shuike* and *hanghu*, purchases could be made with fewer barriers as compared to before. It was no longer the salubrious environment for making rentier profits of old: These profits had to be shared with *hanghu*, trans-regional merchants, and other merchants who operated in the wide Yuanjiang-Hankow timber market, just as Jiang Dexiang had originally

feared in his petitions. Thus we can see that at least some timber merchants like the Hongjiang *muhang* were doing better than before in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁶³

The opening of these floodgates, and the entry of new firms and institutions created a more capital-plenty environment in the Republic that was more competitive for *shanke* compared to the Qing. *Hanghu* collaboration with *shuik* deepened, through lending, and with the branching out into the miscellaneous goods trade. Silver, which used to be the principal medium of exchange, also saw some of its exchange functions replaced by bills of exchange from Hongjiang and other downstream *qianzhuang* firms.⁴⁶⁴ It was a time when there were more participating firms, more *muhang*, more capital, and better liquidity.

This is perhaps the fundamental reason why new *shanke* merchant lineages who rose from modest village backgrounds in the Republic do not appear in biographies any longer. The decline in the formation of new elites was not driven by the entrance of foreign goods. The strength of the market for *yangsong* reflected the broader strength in the timber and construction markets. Indeed if we are to look at measures of socio-economic advances and regression in lineages, we see faint signs of the opposite. The small handful of *fenguan/fenjia* family division documents we see in the *Qingshuijiang wenshu* collections covered here date to the Republic, suggesting a modest trend towards the whittling away of lineage patrimonies accumulated in the Qing. Set in their specific contexts, there were narrow, circumstantial reasons behind each individual lineage's decline, but in general, they all failed to produce fresh generations of merchant elites in this new environment.

Jiang Yuanlin, the expected successor of a successful Jiachi *shanke* merchant line, failed to succeed in the Republic despite continuing the trading business under the Hongshun brand. Jiang

⁴⁶³ Hunan shiye, 394-439.

⁴⁶⁴ Cheng, "Cong yahang."

Shichao's lineage became too large and wieldy. They did not undergo *fenjia* since the Daoguang period, but finally succumbed to pressures against the family's timber trading business during the otherwise healthy recovery of markets in the Guangxu reign. This second peak of the timber market precipitated the process of their disintegration.⁴⁶⁵ Jiang Zhouchang, son of Jiang Dexiang, and descendant of Jiang Shichao's line took his chances not on a career as a timber trader, but in the military. He studied in the Guizhou Military Academy, entered the staff of Wang Jialie (a Guizhou warlord), and eventually joined the Eighth Army.⁴⁶⁶

Compounding the challenges to elite households were extraordinarily destructive droughts and famines. Rice production in the highlands was very sensitive to water shortages, and grain production almost evaporated when drought struck in 1925 to 1926, the worst that elderly villagers told PRC ethnographers that they ever experienced. Rice sold for 400 *wen* per dou, and people sold down their forest properties to buy food. The hardship of this period can occasionally be seen from *minjian* documents. Members of the Jiang lineage in Wendou stated in a contract that the years since 1921 saw "frequent crop failures, with rice ascending [to the value of] pearls (*pinnian jijin, doumi sheng zhu*).” In 1926, they knowingly violated a long-standing prohibition from their ancestors, and sold a sacrificial paddy producing 50 *shi*. Looking from the top-down, the Jinping county magistrate reported to the China International Famine Relief Association that rain simply did not come, and the rice stalks have all wilted. This left no hope for the 1925 autumn harvest, and compounded the already existing problem of roaming bandits and extra-provincial armies that appropriated property. In desperation, people resorted to ferns and wild herbs to ease their hunger.

⁴⁶⁵ Wang, *Wendou*, 26-30.

⁴⁶⁶ JPXZ, 1356.

Reports from the newspaper *Chenbao* in Beijing sent back reports beginning in 1925 on the extraordinarily severe nature of the drought and famine that struck Guizhou and other neighboring provinces in the southwest. The human impact was clearly immense, and they published harrowing photographs of people who recently died of hunger in Guizhou seeking aid. The impact in terms of population was indeed great. Yaoguang and Wendou were said to have lost half their populations in the 1926 famine and accompanying chaos. Kuidan somehow lost only about 40 persons, just under a tenth of its population. Other villages like Yaoli reported that people only managed to survive by relying on a local landlord opening his granaries and setting up gruel kitchens for the poor. He also used his savings to buy timberlands that people put up for sale to stave off the worst of the famine, something we know from the stories people used to spare him as an “enlightened landlord” in the PRC.

Conclusion

The Republic was a mixed bag of rapidly changing fortunes for people in southeastern Guizhou. The globalization of the market for timber in the empire’s Jiangnan core, the entry of large quantities of pre-processed American lumber, and frequent bouts of political and economic instability, wreaked havoc in segments of the domestic *shanmu* market. Exports from areas like Jiangxi suffered, and traditional timber traders made a pivot to trading *yangsong*. Nevertheless, the strength of the urban construction market created enough demand to support many players. While domestic production may have been insufficient by this time, this was compensated for by higher prices. At least from the top line, in terms of the money that was coming into the industry as a whole, we do not see the simplistic story of foreign goods destroying domestic industry that is so often repeated in contemporary publications. There were winners and losers. Traders and dealers of foreign timber did well, and so did the new trading firms downstream of the old

brokerages that took a higher share of the many tolls on the movement of timber. *Shanke* merchants and village elites did less well, with their niche in the timber economy much eroded, and the almost incessant challenges to village welfare in this period. Few great lineage patrimonies were built in this time, unlike in the Qing. Thus, despite the great human tragedies of the 1920s and the 1930s, the system for moving timber from China's hinterlands to its cities still retained some of its old vitality.

From the point of view of the economic history literature, this chapter shows the effects of a convergence in commodity prices from one end of the chain to the other in the Pacific, a story that has more often been told for Atlantic trade, and defined primarily by improvements in transportation technology and declines in trade barriers.⁴⁶⁷ Here we looked specifically at the timber trade, and its pivot in China's coastal cities after 1914. This trade was not simply a product of improving transportation technology, lowering trade barriers, and converging prices. The causes and impacts of the twenty year boom of Chinese timber imports from the United States were multiple. The macroeconomic stories of excess American shipping and production capacity, and Chinese urbanization clearly mattered. But so did the more granular stories of greater acceptance of American timber among Shanghainese builders, stagnant production in the Qingshui river basin, and limited adoption of modern processing technologies in the Chinese timber industry.

Directionally, globalization did not just follow a long historical arc towards convergence either. The twenty year period of large-scale imports from the United States ended well before the old *shanmu* production and marketing system had perished. The end of the Second World War in 1945 brought on one last boom for Guizhou's timber cultivators and traders. Prices shot

⁴⁶⁷ Kevin O'Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-century Atlantic Economy*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

up to levels that had never been seen before. However, Pacific freight rates reached levels of about \$45 per tbf, several times over the pre-war rate. Dollar's business shrunk in volume, and even in the cheap matchstick wood business, which they tried to return to, opportunities for profit evaporated and they made their exit.⁴⁶⁸ In the end it was not global competition from cheaper timber that pushed the cultivators and traders of the old system in Guizhou off the stage, but the state.

⁴⁶⁸ "Letter from G.A. Ganahl, Seattle Office, 1951," Robert Dollar Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of the People's Liberation Army in Jinping county in 1950 brings to a close a long arc, stretching back to the days of the Yongzheng emperor, which combined indigenous villages, Qing magistrates, and forests to transform the region into one with an environment re-made to produce goods for consumers in China's coastal cities, integrated administrative structures, and a highly differentiated, commercialized economy, linked to the fortunes of China and the world. By this time, the paternalistic Qing state, which allowed its indigenous subjects to enjoy customs and privileges related to the timber trade in the interest of political stability, was an increasingly distant memory. The elites and the forests nurtured by this combination were diminished. Under the new political environment, they would be no more. The lands of indigenous elites were expropriated. Jiang Zhouchang, son of militia leader Jiang Dexiang—and coming from a long line going back to Jiang Mingqing, and eventually Jiang Shichao—was denounced in 1952, and committed suicide by hanging.⁴⁶⁹

I will conclude this dissertation with a three-part reflection on the larger implications of this work from three different perspectives. First, I will summarize the empirical findings of this dissertation, and its contribution to our knowledge on the history of China in this place and time. I will then proceed to a discussion of how these findings might serve to modify our broader understanding of how the Qing state worked, and how its agrarian economy was organized. Finally, I will attempt to bring this work into conversation with emergent literatures beyond the field of Chinese history which share similar concerns about how states managed the challenges of governing indigenous peoples and the environments they inhabited, amidst the great enclosure of non-state spaces that began in the early-modern period.

⁴⁶⁹ JPXZ, 1356.

Summary of Historical Findings

The original intention behind this study was to piece together the history behind the persistence of China's forest resources in the Qing, as a way to address the much bigger question of how early modern China's economy alleviated shortages of land-intensive resources. By the time of this study's conception, it had become clear in the literature that China was not the denuded landscape that was once visualized, desperately combed of organic matter by its population. Timber moved in vast quantities across different regions through the Yangzi river system, and fast growing monocultures could be found in significant pockets of the empire. Yet there remained the question of how this came to be, and why forest resources persisted where they did. As I have discussed in the introduction, there are two frameworks that help us think about how greater quantities of forest resources were incorporated into the circulation of the Qing economy. One is the expanding reach of trans-regional merchants and the diffusion of practices in forest cultivation and management across the empire. Another is the expanding reach of the Qing state, into new territories with which it previously had only tenuous connections. Both processes were operative over the period I study, and built a wider and deeper geographical catchment for natural resources in the Qing period, in excess of what was available in the Ming. However, the latter intersection of environment and society, remains an understudied aspect of environmental history in China. It is here, in the making of the sinews of state power in a newly incorporated non-Han area of China, that this paper seeks to make its contributions.

The Qing succeeded in incorporating the natural resources of the Qingshui river basin into its economy by participating in the creation of a new, and stable social order in the region that was attached to Qing rule. The Qing had a major part in the building of a physical basis for the timber trade, organizing waterway improvements, and establishing new administrative centers and

garrisons. More importantly, however, the Qing helped co-create with indigenous elites a loosely organized system for cultivating, protecting, moving, and trading timber, taking advantage of the region's natural endowments, but also protecting local and regional interests,, and creating special pathways to economic mobility and sustenance for their benefit. The building and gradual dismantling of this system is the central story of this dissertation.

Such a system would have been impossible to build without a means of communicating rules and norms regulating the functions of the timber industry, through steles, contracts, and case records. Beyond communicating concrete prohibitions and prescriptions, such texts also had work to communicate the legitimacy of the institutions that ultimately upheld these rules and norms, and the legitimacy of the principles upon which these rules and norms were founded. In this way, the regional history of the Qingshui river basin is evocative of the Roman Empire's success in cultivating loyalty in its provinces, down to the level of the village.⁴⁷⁰ The Qing empire's power rested not in the garrisons, but in the confidence cultivated among its inhabitants in the legitimacy of the empire as arbiter between interests, and in the idea that it would make just decisions based on principles that were shared between a magistrate and his subjects.

In this light, we might better understand the meaning of the communicative work that regional and local elites in the Qingshui river basin have done. They copied documents—plaints, petitions, contracts—stored them in their own archives, and took meticulous care of them, in ritualistic inspections and drying of family documents. They re-copied them on stone tablets—which might themselves be re-copied—to be displayed in the functional equivalent of public fora in their place and time: They were laid in somber array within Dong drum towers, temples of regional deities, and strategic locations in the waterways, where their presence and

⁴⁷⁰ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

permanence was repeatedly impressed upon the visitors who came and went with the cycles of ritual and commercial life. Within the technological constraints of the early modern world, this served as a form of mass communication, disseminating ideas about how markets were to be ordered, and on what authority, on what rationale to a large population. It also gave the region a shared vocabulary with which to discuss and frame these problems. The texts that these elites transmitted across space and time in the Qingshui river basin are reflections of their ambition to mold an emerging order into their vision, with the backing of magistrates. In this, they did work to legitimize the empire, and set the terms by which the surplus from the Qingshui river's forests might be exploited.

In light of the system's eventual dissolution, it is easy to read such sources with cynicism as memorials to how regional elites fought in vain to maintain their advantages against the counter-incentives that the market set. This dissertation takes the attempt to regulate the market for timber seriously, just as magistrates and petitioners have done. These rules and norms are presented here as material contributors to the rise of the *shanke*, and the sustenance of ordinary households in the region, not as dead letters. They served as reflections of what elites thought the proper order was, and a measure of the faith they reposed in these texts as a basis upon which they can demand from the Qing its maintenance. While scattered and unorganized, these texts formed an archive that was used and re-used as references for petitions and decisions, and as a mine for terms and framings.

These archives, together with archives traditionally used in the study of Qing history, have enabled this dissertation to make several basic empirical contributions to our understanding of the timber industry, environmental history, and the history of Qing expansion into the southwest. It provides a detailed empirical account of how timber production in the Qingshui river basin

was sustained by upstream producers and landowners, including not only highly textured, individual evidence from cases in the Qing imperial archives and cases duplicated in private family archives, but also statistical evidence from across villages and time periods to create a more generalizable account within the bounds of the region. In contrast to the present literature, which assigns a high degree of importance to the transplantation of techniques in timber management from China proper into Guizhou, in particular through timber securitization, which allows owners to resolve the cash flow issues inherent to long-term timber cultivation, this dissertation suggests that liquidity of future shares for timberlands was spotty in practice. Shares were difficult to sell in a timely fashion, and resulted in discounts and poor returns for all but the most patient and best capitalized owners of timber shares.

One way of resolving this problem was the high degree of concentration of timberland holdings within politically powerful lineages that had a role in governing local and regional society, who had a vested interest in maintaining a continuous supply of timber in the long term and were able to see through short- and medium-term economic cycles. This dissertation tries to accomplish this by tracing the fortunes and activities of these lineages over time. These lineages are placed within a fuller context of the distinct local institutions and customs that gave form to their political power, as well as the more generalizable context of Qing administrative flexibility and local protectionism that allowed them to flourish. Here, we see how they worked through the indigenous *kuanyue* tradition of village compacts, and combined these with *tuanlian*, *baojia*, and village headmanship to create hybrid sub-county institutions for governing in the Qingshui river basin.

Central to the ascent of this elite was market segmentation. This dissertation serves as an exposition of how within the unity of the Qing trans-regional market for goods, there were

politically imposed divisions that attenuated the peripheralization of places like the Qingshui river as providers of cheap natural resources to the empire's urban core in Jiangnan. For every log that flowed down the Qingshui river, locals exacted a heavy toll, both by force of custom and the magistrate's support: Uncompetitive markets for stumpage, transportation labor, and brokerage created a pool for surplus from which indigenous elites built formidable lineages that competed in the imperial examinations, and from which ordinary households and migrants pieced together a life of relative material plenty in the context of the early modern world. While these conditions degraded by the late-Qing and the Republic, with the globalization of the timber and construction market in urban areas, and the decline of state commitment to traditional customs and privileges, this period indelibly changed the social and economic landscape of the region, shifting its locus of power to the villages engaged in the timber export trade, and creating a social elite that continued to bind the region to the central state.

Finally, this dissertation provides some of the few highly textured accounts of the individual lives and voices of the cultivators, traders, landowners, and migrants who realized the more abstract architecture of the timber market's segmentation, its regulation, and its governance on the ground, using legal sources preserved in both private and state archives. Popular sources, mostly composed of sterile property contracts that transmit only basic information to readers can make for a distant history devoid of human stories. This dissertation attempts to write a regional history that includes both highly contextualized individual accounts, as well as more impersonal, generalizable data that can be scraped from the large volume of popular documents that are available through published document collections.

The Qing State: The Magistrate's Informal Imperium

This dissertation also seeks to revise our understanding of how the Qing state functioned at the level of the magistrate, and at the level of the village.⁴⁷¹ Classic texts on Qing administrative history including the groundbreaking works of Hsiao Kung-chuan and Ch'u T'ung-tsu were already cognizant of the deep fissures that existed between the formal and informal aspects of governance at this level. Hsiao, while claiming in his introduction that district magistrates were tightly bound by Qing administrative law, and had very little discretionary power over routine matters, repeatedly recognized deviations from formal prescriptions across the board, from the implementation of *baojia*, to the operation of granaries.⁴⁷² Ch'u was more explicit in his recognition of this gap. His key contribution was to unearth the central importance of non-statutory staff under the direct supervision of the magistrate, and outside the scope of the formal civil service, in the practice of governing districts. This included private secretaries, personal servants, clerks, and runners. More importantly, however, he was explicit in his recognition of how magistrates were compelled to resort to extra-statutory means to bridge the gap between the formal demands of the post and the reality of their capacities. They drew on customary fees and charges, while also corraling labor for public works, and engaging the local official-gentry through monetary contributions and service in *baojia* and *tuanlian*. Ch'u's work was foundational for thinking about the Qing government at this level more holistically, beyond its formally organized aspects, by defining government in the Qing more broadly as “participation in the governing process.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ John Watt, *The District Magistrate in Late Imperial China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Thomas Metzger, *The Internal Organization of Ch'ing Bureaucracy: Legal, Normative, and Communication Aspects*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

⁴⁷² Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967).

⁴⁷³ T'ung-tsu Ch'u, *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Later works have explored this tension between the formal and informal aspects of local governance in greater depth. Watt, in his landmark study presents the Qing district magistrate as caught between moral duties to his subjects, and the demands of the Qing state, which grew more onerous over time. The magistrate was compelled to harmonize these two competing demands, using tools like extra-statutory collections, while working with local elites to make these collections acceptable.⁴⁷⁴ Bradley Reed, using the archives of Ba county in Sichuan, has demonstrated how indispensable extra-statutory clerks and runners were to actual governance for magistrates. While their role in local government, and the means for funding them, were eventually legalized, they show how magistrates, in practice, adapted to the conditions far in advance of the law. Faced with a litigious and growing population and limited revenue streams, magistrates tolerated the necessity of extra-statutory clerks and runners, who belonged to the informal realm of government, but nevertheless maintained their own quasi-bureaucratic sense of autonomy and formalism, governed by rules and enforcement mechanisms. Reed thus builds on a long line of works that have blurred the state-society boundary, and leaves us with a detailed impression of how the informal realm of the Qing government operated.

Nevertheless, the current body of work has neglected a key problem that remains unresolved in the current English-language literature. One of the ways in which the Qing was distinct from other periods of Chinese history was the extent and intensity of its expansion into new territories, inhabited by non-Han peoples who operated under different social and economic traditions on its peripheries. Especially in the southwest, the *zhou-xian* administration system, and tools for village administration like *baojia*, *tuanlian*, and *xiangyue*, came to displace institutions of indirect rule like native chieftaincies, despite limited sources of local revenue, no pre-existing

⁴⁷⁴ Bradley Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

gentry elites in the Confucian mold, and the presence of indigenous political and social structures and practices. The situation in the southwest was not reducible to a process of transplantation of settlers with their agricultural, social, and political practices, and thus made for a challenge distinct from that seen in settler colonies, both within the Qing and elsewhere. While the current literature has made great progress in expanding our understanding of Qing governance at the grassroots beyond its formally prescribed boundaries, these works have so far dealt only with cases in China proper that faced a different set of problems, with a similar set of tools. How the *zhou-xian* system succeeded beyond China proper, and facilitated the Qing empire's territorial expansion and incorporation of different peoples and environments on its frontier has yet to be seriously considered.

Meanwhile, a critical mass of literature addressing this problem in the Qing southwest, and revising current understandings of how the Qing state operated has built up in the Chinese-language literature over the past two decades. This development builds fundamentally on the availability of large quantities of sources through publications of private primary source collections (*minjian wenshu*) and the collection of sources by historical anthropologists in the field. Collectively, just as this dissertation argues, these works demonstrate that Qing magistrates operated with a great amount of latitude in the southwest, tolerating, and even actively employing non-statutory means to build and maintain social order. They managed the contradictions between the changing policies from higher levels of the Qing state with realities on the ground, presenting a different face for the different needs within their jurisdiction. In a way, they operated their own imperium within their own jurisdictions.

The *tusi* and its bureaucratization and elimination has for example served as one of the central, long-running dramas of Qing incorporation. However, little is understood about how the

broad ambition of native chieftain elimination interacted with the granular realities that magistrates faced on the ground. Lu Shuxin's work, *The Re-making of the Native Chieftain*, shows the stunning degree of latitude with which magistrates acted to manage the reality of administering new territories in southeastern Guizhou. In contravention of Qing statutes, and acting solely on their own authority, without approval from Beijing, they established posts called “native officials” (*tubian* 土弁) to assist in their administration of Miao hamlets in Guizhou, Sichuan and Yunnan.⁴⁷⁵

Technically, the closest analogy for *tubian* in Qing government were the runners and clerks—and more broadly the personal servants of the magistrates (*zai guan renyi* 在官人役)—that Bradley Reed wrote about in his monograph. And it was indeed it was under this status of the magistrate's personal servants that they were tried by analogy in a case that Lu found in the *xingke tiben* archives. While the *tubian* post took on some of the characteristics of native chieftains—sometimes the post was inheritable, and came with the administrative powers and land grants of conventional native chieftains—it was a distinct status that they lacked the key formal symbolic authority of the native chieftains, with their seals and charters. The scope of their tasks was circumscribed at the magistrate's judgment, and their salary came from the magistrate's own pocket.

Lu's work explicitly overturns conventional wisdom on the Qing's success in incorporating the southwest. He sees it not as founded upon the formal institutions of state—the new sub-prefectures, the garrisons, new legal frameworks, etc—but upon the “counter-system activities” (*wei zhidu guiding de shanquan xingwei* 违制度规定的擅权行为) that magistrates

⁴⁷⁵ Lu Shuxin, *Zai zao tusi: Qingdai Qiandongnan de shehui zhili ji qi yanbian* 再造土司：清代黔东南的社会治理及变迁 [Remaking the Headmen: Social Governance and Changes in Southeast Guizhou During the Qing Dynasty], (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2022).

illicitly constructed under the facade of the formal system to adapt to the actual demands that were placed upon them by realities on the ground.⁴⁷⁶

The foundational problem in this region, as it was for limited pre-modern states in general, was finding effective intermediaries for the empire. This concern for historicizing the various intermediaries in empire studies more broadly has also appeared in Qing studies in the southwest, and the search, both by scholars, and by Qing contemporaries, for proxies or intermediaries (*daili ren*).⁴⁷⁷

The Dong *kuan* as intermediary for the Qing—a problem which this dissertation also covers—was also studied in detail in the recently published dissertation of Wu Juanting, on the integration of the Dong *kuan* alliances in the formal administrative structures of Western Hunan.⁴⁷⁸ The Qing state, confronted with the failure of the Ming’s military colony system, and lacking intermediaries with which to govern the region, latched onto the *kuanyue* as a means to directly reach indigenous villages. Magistrates tied a system for “rewarding” the Miao with the traditional *hekuan* cattle sacrifice rituals, which was then appropriated as a means to obtain information about village land holdings, and eventually transform the *kuan* institutions into *li*,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁷⁷ Wen Chunlai, “Preface,” in Lu Shuxin, *Zai zao tusi*; Wen Chunlai, *Cong Yiyu Dao Jiujiang: Song Zhi Qing Guizhou Xibei Bu Diqu de Zhidu Kaifa Yu Rentong*, 从“异域”到“旧疆”：宋至清贵州西北部地区的制度、开发与认同 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008); Xie Shaohui, *Zhizao Bianyuanxing: 10-19 Shiji de Xiangxi* 制造边缘性：10—19 世纪的湘西 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2020); Zhang Nanlin 张楠林, “Ming Qing shiqi Qianxinan Tuliubing zhi yu fuyi zhengshou 明清时期黔西南的“土流并治”与赋役征收,” *Zhongguo bianjiang shi di yanjiu* 29.1 (2019): 70-81.

⁴⁷⁸ Wu Juanting, “Wu Jun Zhang Shehui de Zuzhi Jizhi: Song Zhi Qing Xiang Gui Qian Jiaojie Diqu de Kuan Yu Shehui Bianqian ‘母君长’社会的组织机制：宋至清湘桂黔交界地区的款与社会变迁,” (Ph.D dissertation, Sun Yat-sen University, 2024).

which became the model for an ethnically differentiated tax assessment and collection system in the indigenous districts of southwestern Hunan.⁴⁷⁹

The present dissertation is part of this recent wave of historical studies on the Qing southwest, which, collectively, have tried to uncover the means by which magistrates were able to realize direct administration of the region's grassroots by the mid-nineteenth century. Its contribution to this new literature is to account for how customary economic privileges were mobilized by magistrates and their subjects to govern the politics of distributing the surplus from the Qingshui river basin's timber export industry at the level of the region and the village. While the latitude that magistrates had to govern their jurisdiction's political economy has occasionally been covered in the English-language literature, including in similar contexts of dividing surpluses from the environment, it remains a poorly understood part of Qing governance, whose legal and historical basis is unclear. At the present, there are works in progress seeking to address this aspect of Qing governance, through the angles of mistranslations and misunderstandings in Tibetan administrative categories (in a manner similar to the *kuanyue*), and the diffusion of adaptive governance practices among Qing officials.⁴⁸⁰ In general, however, few studies are available to readers of the English-language literature, and so far they have received little attention. This dissertation on the other hand demonstrates how, despite lack of clarity on the extent of their ability to introduce and affirm market privileges based on an ethnic or customary

⁴⁷⁹ Wu Juanting, "Ming Qing Xiangxinan Miaojiang de Lijia Fuyi Yu Shehui Zuzhi de Bianqian 明清湘西南苗疆的里甲赋役与社会组织变迁," *Zhongguo Shehui Jingji Shi Yanjiu* (2024): 1–14.

⁴⁸⁰ Palden Gyal, "From Tusi to Gyelpo: Navigating Qing Imperial Categories on the Sichuan-Tibet Frontier," Paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies Conference, Columbus, OH, March 15, 2025; On diffusion of locally adaptive administrative practices, see Charles Argon, "Dai Zhaochen Learns to be an Official: Statecraft Ideas and Local Governance in Late Qing China," *Journal of Chinese History* (2025): 1–22.

nature, these privileges were consistently accepted by Qing magistrates, and treated by the people who documented and reproduced them as akin to customary law, to which the magistrate's decisions can be held to account.

Similar to Lu Shuxin and Wu Juanting, this work also demonstrates the process by which indigenous political institutions like the *kuanyue* alliance compacts and village elder (*zhailao*) leadership were integrated into the formal Qing administrative framework. While Lu and Wu address bureaucratization through the institutions of the *tubian* and the *li*, both of which existed within the formal framework of Qing law but operated differently in practice, my work looks at bureaucratic integration of sub-county indigenous institutions through the activation of *kuanyue* village alliances under the framework of *baojia* and *tuanlian*. While the documentation for kuan activities are not systematic, and do not extend continuously over time, we do see from documents of *baojia-tuanlian* heads, steles, writings by the magistrate, and scattered mentions from private archives, how the Liping magistrates actively sought out *kuanyue* alliances as militia auxiliaries, attempted to improve its organization and effectiveness, and maintained contacts with them even after the rebellion had subsided.

These works show the extent to which magistrates defied formal limits to their scope of action in practice, and the extent of their creativity in finding places within the framework of formal Qing administration to accommodate the indigenous political institutions and actors, whose capture was of the utmost importance to the Qing's ambition of establishing lasting control down to the grassroots level in southeastern Guizhou and southwestern China more generally. Much energy has been devoted in the literature to the grand changes in policy towards the incorporation of the southwest. But from what we now understand from these findings, it seems that the locus of the Qing's success in this wider region was made not in Beijing, but in

the magistrate's *yamen*. Here, the magistrate, who enjoyed a large degree of operational independence in practice, created new quasi-bureaucratic arms, incorporated indigenous institutions into Qing institutional containers, and shifted the contours of the local political economy to cultivate indigenous allies.

China and the Anthropocene

Finally we return to the forest, its place in the Qing, and the broader global history of the environment. The bigger context in which I have initially placed this work was the great expansion of territorial states across the surface of the globe in the early modern period, inspired by John F. Richard's global accounts of frontiers and forest history. The major implication of his account was to de-center the role of countries that went through fossil fuel powered industrial revolutions in the grand arc of environmental transformation. The success of state territorial expansion to the very ends of the earth created wider and wider catchments upon which to obtain goods to satisfy human needs and desires. This account creates an alternative trajectory of early modern economic development and its environmental implications. This trajectory presented here was not necessarily a pathway to archetypal "modern" patterns of vastly increased consumption of land and energy intensive goods that we associate with present environmental problems, of individuals travelling in oil-powered machines, feeding on diets sustained by vast acres of land. However, it did contribute to a pathway of development that was also recognizably "modern" for much of the rest of the world, of vastly bigger populations supported by improvements in basic material welfare, the intensification of land use, and efficient sourcing and use of resources. With the incorporation of southeastern Guizhou's forests into the circulation of the Qing economy, more people across the empire could obtain shelter from the elements, both for themselves and their cottage industries. They could make tools that enabled

them to farm land more intensively, build ships to move their products, construct waterworks that defended them from acts of nature. In this way, southeastern Guizhou became part of the larger story of the anthropocene, an epoch distinguished by the scale and extent of human impact and embeddedness in the global environment.

The scale of the anthropocene and the impact of human activities obscures in its grandeur the place that small producers had in these grand environmental transformations. In this dissertation, we glide down from the global vision of anthropocene studies into the highly textured, and complicated world of villages, humans, their social structures, and the land that they worked. How was it that they came to produce for the needs and wants of the market, hand over the surplus of the land, and work it more intensively?

It is often treated as a given that producers will not be able to spurn the market. At the most extreme, there is the possibility of expropriation of the land and the compulsion of labor, familiar in the Americas.⁴⁸¹ But in the global context, there were other paths in between, and in all these cases there was indigenous agency. Markets and states did not expand with uniform hegemony across territories without the frictions posed by the environment, physical geography, and human politics. Thus we see combinations of commodified and non-commodified, “rational” and irrational, or various other configurations of non-total openings across the fields that global markets and extractive states have touched. Thus the question was not simply of participation in these wider systems, but on what terms. Spoils had to be divided between producers, movers and consumers. The timing and compulsion of participation had to be worked out. Such terms had to be arranged between different actors in the field, and no market was innocent of these politics.

⁴⁸¹ The Americas cover a large geographical area with many indigenous peoples, but some accounts include William Cronon, *Changes in the Land, Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Alan Greer, *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Indigenous societies, made in the crucible of enclosure into larger states, were deeply involved in the political struggles over the terms of their incorporation. Intermediaries had to be made and thrust into representative roles. Decisions, often at the mundane level of individuals and households, had to be made over which among the constellation of ideas and assumptions from incorporating states were to be accommodated—the degree to which they were to inhabit a single environmental, political, economic, and cultural world. This dissertation traces the push and pull between incorporation and resistance to incorporation at the local and regional level, telling the story of the formation of a milieu who came to fill an intermediary slot between state and society in the Qingshui river region that was poorly filled by the native chieftains and garrison towns that were previously imposed by Chinese empires. This was not completely unique to the region. Interfacing between state and indigenous society was worked out over practice across the southwest and the Qing empire at large, just as it was in any of the expansionary territorial empires of the early modern period. Within the context of the macrohistorical forces they faced—the vastly more capable Qing state, and changes in the reach of migrants and merchants—one still empathizes with their efforts to find space for themselves and for the forest in this new world, despite the mostly invisible frictions they generated within indigenous society.

Worthy of recognition in this grand arc of expansion and intensification are not just the great statesmen or the great merchants, but also the bureaucracy at the frontlines of social, economic and environmental management. Their main concern was for the mundane tasks of governance, mediating disputes, adjudicating cases, collecting taxes, and more broadly, to the extent that they are able, getting their jurisdictions towards their own notions of basic material welfare and civilization. While they were not necessarily concerned with territorial expansion or land

intensification themselves—such thoughts may not have crossed their minds, certainly not in these terms—they would have certainly been concerned with ensuring the production and supply of food, the orderly conduct of commerce, and work to provide for the basic physical sustenance of their jurisdictions. The magistrates of the Qingshui river basin played no small part here, organizing the improvement of the physical environment for commerce, strategically shifting the burdens of taxation, and massaging the terms of indigenous participation in the timber market to help make it more equitable. Their efforts to improve their subjects reflects a logic that was other than capitalism or state aggrandization, but was rather something more akin to a paternalistic civilizing mission, and a fundamental concern for human material welfare on an everyday basis. This was different from the developmentalism of modern nation-states that sought to improve their populations in the context of competitive inter-state relations, but it did reflect a more fundamental impulse for improvement that was shared by people across economic systems.⁴⁸²

Concluding Summary

Before the eighteenth century, the Qingshui river basin's indigenous villages, and the products of its land, were at best loosely incorporated into the political structures and economic circulation of the Qing dynasty. The mountainous landscape was covered by forests that grew from rotating slash-and-burn agriculture. Villages and village alliances made intermittent contact with the state, occasionally mediated by the many small native chieftains that covered several tens of villages each. By the nineteenth century, the landscape had shifted into more homogeneous stands of *shanmu* that pulsed downstream in a steady annual cadence. They were grown in orderly plots divided by streams, rock markers, and ridges. The political landscape had also changed. The zones of native chieftain influence emanating from relatively inland,

⁴⁸² Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, (London: Verso, 2015); Christophe Bounneuil and Jean-Baptiste Frescoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, (London: Verso, 2017).

agriculturally rich settlements had grown paler. Meanwhile, the zones of Miao village power, anchored on littoral settlements and locally dominant lineages involved in the timber trade, who built some of the grandest permanent structures in the region, and erected stone monuments to mark borders and restrain people's conduct took on deeper and deeper shades. The twentieth century sees much of the same, though the forests are sparser, the pulse of trade weaker, more unpredictable.

The change in the environmental landscape in the early modern period towards well-ordered stands of *shanmu* is well understood now, both in this region specifically, and for China more broadly. Less understood is the change in the social and political landscape, and how it relates to the former. This deficiency derives in part from the limitations of the primary sources, from which information on social and political life is more geographically scattered, temporally intermittent, and unsystematic relative to what they relate to us regarding economic activities in the region. The difficulty of understanding this social and political context derives too, in part, from the ambiguities of the categories and containers used to describe the landscape, and the success of the region's incorporation, that has rendered this result a seemingly natural outcome.

Society and the politics within it mattered to the forest and its transformation into a commodity for two reasons. It needed agents whose interests were vested in their growth and movement, who coordinated between the different components of state and society to supply the forest's need for long-term security and regeneration, in alignment with their own economic interest and self-perpetuation. The worst outcomes in this regard are the dominance of agents whose interests had no alignment at all with the long-term sustenance of forest, through geographically-mobile merchants, locally-disinterested bureaucrats, itinerant cultivators, and absentee landlords. Frontier expansion in China could have approximated processes happening

across the world around the same time, with the grand harvest of forests in the western United States, Brazil, and the Caribbean in the early modern period.⁴⁸³

It also mattered because the movement into this new world of commercial agriculture, wage labor, and property was destabilizing, and potentially harmful to the making and maintaining of an environmental order, in which trees—or any other commodity that was faced with similar long-term production dilemmas—were sold down the river in an indefinite annual cadence. The Qingshui river basin's fate could very well have been different, with a more limited degree of integration into trans-regional commodity markets and imperial state structures, or an excess of integration that exposed forests to other problems—untrammelled access to its land for subsistence agriculture, or the loss of locally-rooted agents with whom its perpetuation was linked. The Qingshui river, over its history, came upon a happy middle ground.

Nothing is more emblematic of this than the *kuan* militias that held down the region in the mid-nineteenth century. Run by lineages who were timber traders and owners themselves, they regulated the conduct of trade and cultivation, protected local and regional economic interests, and served as the principal coercive institutions when this order was challenged, funding militia in part through their own funds, but also through collections from the population at large. This role became less acceptable in the Republic, when forest cultivation and trading became less secure and profitable. Still, the long arc we see here represents a major success in the Qing's governance of new territories, with different environments inhabited by distinct ethnic groups, a vindication of the willings of its magistrates to work with indigenous intermediaries in bowing to

⁴⁸³ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens And The Origins Of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge University Press, 1996; Richard Tucker and John F. Richards eds., *Global Deforestation and the Nineteenth-Century World Economy*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York :W. W. Norton, 1991).

customs, defending local and regional interests, and accommodating indigenous political traditions into the existing categories of Qing rule.

Photographs



Xavier Ante, *Jinping wenshu lou* 锦屏文书楼 (Jinping Archive Pavilion), photograph, Jinping County, Guizhou Province, China, August 27, 2023.



Xavier Ante, The Qingshui river in Jinping [formerly Wangzhai], photograph, Jinping County, Guizhou Province, China, August 27, 2023.



Xavier Ante, A typical landscape in southeastern Guizhou with a village on the foot of steep slopes, photograph, unknown village, Guizhou Province, China, September 1, 2024.

Bibliography

Abbreviations Used in Notes

BZR	<i>Kishū Byōzoku ringyō keiyaku bunsho kaihen</i>
DSL D	<i>Dongzu shehui lishi diaocha</i>
FHA	<i>First Historical Archives</i>
GWZX	<i>Guizhou wenshi ziliao xuanji</i>
JPBX	<i>Jinping beiwen xuanji</i>
JPLB	<i>Jinping linye beiwen xuanji</i>
JPZX	<i>Jinping xian zhi</i>
JSZP	<i>Jiangshi zupu</i>
JZDB	<i>Jiuzhai Dongzu baojia tuanlian dang'an</i>
LPFZ	<i>Liping fuzhi</i>
PMJL	<i>Ping Miao jilüe</i>
SHMA	<i>Shanghai Municipal Archives</i>
SSLS	<i>Shishang lishi</i>
QMWX	<i>Qing Zhi Minguo Wuyuan Xian Cunluo Qiyue Wenshu Jilu</i>
QNSL	<i>Qiannan Shilüe</i>
QSJWS	<i>Qingshuijiang wenshu</i>
YZF	<i>Guizhou Wendou Zhai Miao zu Qiyue Falü Wenshu Huibian: Yi Zunfa</i>

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