

The Age of Wild Ghosts

Memory, Violence, and Place
in Southwest China

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Sometimes I think it all began the day I met Li Yun.¹ I was taking tea in a graceful riverbank mansion, once the home of a local despot, now the seat of a township government in Yunnan Province. Li Yun staggered through the door, bent under a load of firewood. He was an elderly man in horn-rimmed glasses, very thin and very drunk. He spotted me, dumped his firewood in a corner, and bellowed, “American comrade! Chairman Mao sent this one from America to help the minority people carry out socialist reconstruction! You wear glasses and carry a pen! I too am a member of the Communist Party assigned by Chairman Mao to the task of building the new China!” I could only open my mouth and stare until a township official gently drew Li Yun into another room.

Later that afternoon, I watched the old man set off up the canyon road, stumbling and singing in the rain. The road—a footpath, really—led to a scattering of mountain villages, the township’s largest and poorest brigade,² inhabited mainly by “minority people,” officially of the “Yi nationality.” For several months, I had been seeking permission to live in this brigade, known as Zhizuo in Chinese and as Júzò (“little valley”) in the local Tibeto-Burman language.³ A few days later, I followed the same path twenty kilometers up a canyon to a narrow valley, the center of Zhizuo, where I eventually found a place to live in an elementary school.

Living in Zhizuo, I learned to fear Li Yun’s approach. Sometimes I had warning. I would hear him coming, bellowing fragments of slogans, and I would slip out the school’s back door. Or I would spot him from

afar, descending from his village on the sun-drenched eastern slope, and I would guess that he was headed across the valley to the large village where I lived, eventually to find his way to my room. Sometimes he ambushed me. He would materialize out of the crowd at a wedding or funeral, take my hand in a lockwrench grip, and bellow outdated Maoist slogans into my face. For these harangues, he never used either the flowing Tibeto-Burman tongue employed here in daily life or the harsher Yunnan dialect of Chinese used to communicate with outsiders. Instead, he enunciated his slogans with precision, in formal standard Chinese, the language of officialdom: “Without the Communist Party there would be no new China! Ten thousand years to Chairman Mao!” I would wince, smile patiently, and wait for some kind soul to divert his attention. Li Yun was not threatening; he was just unbearably friendly. His mission, which he pursued with energy for more than a year, was to take me home for dinner; his method was brute force. He was very strong, and once he got hold of my hand and started along the path toward his house, I could only stumble along behind until he relaxed enough for me to twist out of his grasp, voice a quick apology, and dash away.

I was desperate to ignore Li Yun. He represented a side of life here that I hated. When officials from higher levels of government visited, I watched his antics through their eyes. Filthy, alcoholic, crazy as a loon, he seemed to shamefully confirm their complaints about the local “minority population”: they drank too much; they were unsanitary and superstitious; they were enamored of their own poverty; they had no education and no culture. When he accosted me in public, I watched myself through his eyes. Clearly powerful, with connections, spectacles, and a pocket pen, I was a person with whom to ingratiate oneself, if only with a dinner of rice and chicken soup—and how could I not share most officials’ perceptions of himself and his neighbors as dirty, alcoholic, and degenerate? I tried to put Li Yun out of my mind as I went about my business of conducting interviews, listening to stories, recording statistics, attending rituals, and transcribing poetry.

But he was always there, at the edges of my perception, comic, furious, and emaciated, stumbling along the valley paths, shouting anachronistic political slogans to the melodies of courting songs, singing laments properly reserved for mortuary rituals. “He is mad [*tʰe*, implying possession],” my friends in Zhizuo said, tolerating his interruptions with the cheerful public demeanor I soon came to expect of them. Yet what kind of madness, among the many forms they could diagnose, not even

the experts on spirit possession I had begun to consult could say. All I learned was that everyone around him associated Li Yun's affliction in some way with his long tenure as an official—among the most eminent this brigade had produced. Beginning in the mid-1950s, he had served as the head of a neighboring township. He had been hospitalized for mental illness in 1966, as the Cultural Revolution began. He was formally reinstated to his position a few years later; he retired early in 1976, returning home to Zhizuo. His wife was dead, but he had one daughter, who worked in the country town and sent him money. I learned virtually nothing more: I could not talk to Li Yun, and others deflected my questions about him.

Still, I found I could not stop thinking about Li Yun's mad incantations, those startling eruptions of anachronistic speech that heralded his presence at so many public gatherings. Were they merely symptoms of a personal derangement? Or did they issue instead from a collective past that also haunted others? Why did they take the form of political slogans? What was the singular power of those formulas in an alien tongue that they could haunt or possess one, and how could they still be echoing through this valley so many years after their meaning and authority had faded away? Above all, I was troubled by the enormous pain that seemed to darken Li Yun's bellowing voice. What wounds did it reopen for those who heard it; what histories did it conceal? And how might such wounds and histories relate to the entity that Li Yun's slogans named and renamed with such obsessive energy: the socialist state?



I was to learn that Li Yun's affliction was not exceptional. Many people in this community referred to the present age, beginning with the catastrophic famine that followed the Great Leap Forward in 1958–1960 and continuing through the 1990s, as the “age of wild ghosts.” This phrase captured the sense that life in this era was inflected by eruptions into the present of unreconciled fragments of the past, often personified as the ghosts of people (or spirits) who had met bad ends and who frequently possessed or killed their descendants. Most such eruptions were quieter than Li Yun's roaring. Yet many gathered force and persistence as they were elaborated in stories, their origins divined, their qualities explicated, their symptoms treated. Some eventually accumulated the coherence of strategies—to subvert state projects, to enunciate calls for justice, or to open up avenues for healing.

This book traces the struggles of the people of Li Yun's community to find their place at the end of a century of violence and at the margins of a nation-state. These were efforts to shape a habitable place—in bodies, houses, and the national landscape—in a time when ordering space was a principal mode of state power. They were attempts to reshape past and present time in a place where ordering time was the central project and exclusive prerogative of the state. In a specific and limited sense, then, this is an ethnography of the state. It approaches the state *first* not as a system of institutions, a network of power relations, or a history of policies and programs, but as an aspect of the “social imaginary,” in the sense that Cornelius Castoriadis gave this term. Every social community, Castoriadis reflected, must answer a few fundamental questions:

Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking? Society must define its “identity,” its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires. Without the “answer” to these “questions,” without these “definitions,” there can be no human world, no society, no culture—for everything would be an undifferentiated chaos. The role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions, an answer that, obviously, neither “reality,” nor “rationality” can provide. . . . Society constitutes itself by producing a *de facto* answer to these questions in its life, in its activity. It is in the *doing* of each collectivity that the answer to these questions appears as an embodied meaning; this social doing allows itself to be understood only as a reply to the questions that it implicitly poses itself. (1987, 147)

States pose and answer such constituting questions in reference to the imagined communities they govern. In practice, states are loosely coordinated systems of institutions, policies, symbols, and processes. Their capacity to affect events, produce meanings, or work themselves into the bodies of their subjects depends on how they are imagined collectively as unitary entities. As Ann Anagnost (1997) argues, the socialist state in China, especially during the Mao era, was particularly striking in this regard. It was a weak and disorganized institution; its power depended on its capacity to impose its own visions of itself on the social world. It was a “magnanimous sorcerer,” to borrow Fernando Coronil's words, which “sieve[d] its subjects by inducing a condition or state of being receptive to its illusions—a magical state” (1997, 5).

This book investigates concrete practices and poetics as resources for engaging, diverting, or replacing the tangible “illusions” of this magical state, and thus for submitting to or deflecting its grasp. Among these practices

are ritualized methods for doing useful things: treating physical and psychic afflictions; promoting the fertility of crops, animals, and people; riding bodies, houses, and the proximate landscape of undesirable nonhuman entities. These methods involve two formalized “languages.” One is a language of materials: everyday objects such as twigs, grasses, string, clothing, and bowls, used to sculpt representations of ghosts or spirits. The other is a verbal poetic language: ritual chants used to communicate with nonhuman entities, their vocabulary drawn largely from daily practice. These languages are resources for thinking about the practiced diligence of everyday life—the acquired capacities for taking care of oneself, one’s family, and one’s community—and for evading the domination of others, human or nonhuman, living or dead. At the same time, as is typical of ritualized languages in China, they produce manifold, mutable images of the state. The state they imagine is not external to the fundamental concerns of daily life, nor does it penetrate this intimate sphere only from the outside. It is a constitutive force at the heart of the social world. To envision it is to pose and answer questions about the social world, about relations to this world and the objects it contains, about social needs and social desires.

A story I was told in the context of a mortuary ritual reflects on the state in this sense, as framing the conditions for social existence. I heard several versions of this story—this one from a man in his fifties at the funeral of one of his affines. It is about the careful operations of mourning, in which material objects such as bamboo sieves and paper screens are ritually manipulated to regulate transactions between the living and the dead, allowing the living to escape being dominated by their grief. In this story, it is the state, in the form of market officials, that sets the rules for grief’s transactions and oversees the discriminations that mourning creates between the living and their objects of loss:

Long ago, the living [*ts’ɔ*] could see the dead [*nè*], and the dead could see the living. Living and dead both attended the market: on that side of the street the dead sold their things; on this side the living sold theirs; and the dead took the same form as the living. At that time they used copper money, not paper. The dead used paper to stamp out coins that looked just like the copper coins of the living, and with this money they bought things from the living. But the living were not to be trifled with. They put the coins in a pan of water: the real coins made of copper sank, and the paper coins made by the dead floated. They returned the false money to the dead, and gradually the dead could no longer buy from the living; they could buy only from other dead. If your father died, you could go to the market the next day and see him. But it was not permitted for living

and dead to speak to each other. The dead were punished if they spoke to the living—their officials taxed and fined them—and the living were afraid to speak to the dead. So living and dead could only look at each other. Then, as now, the dead sometimes harmed [*k'ə*, literally “bite”] the living, but the living could beat the dead in return, so the dead had no power over them. Disgusted with this situation, the dead petitioned for a bamboo sieve to be set up between them and the living. The living could see the dead only vaguely, but the dead [being closer to the sieve’s holes] could see the living clearly. The living did not like this, for the sieve was too thick to beat the dead through. The living were stupid: some say they asked for a paper screen to be placed on their side of the street; they could beat the dead through the paper, but they could not see them at all.

The state is held at a distance in this tale. It is glimpsed only once, through its representatives, officials who tax and fine the dead. Yet the entire scene takes place under its watchful gaze. Its authority glimmers in the authentic copper coins that sink in water, cutting off market transactions across the street; its permission erects the sieves and screens that curtail the “bite” of loss. The imagined state is seen to enable and structure mourning, yet it is also found to be an agent of loss: the story is told in the context of a mortuary rite that sends back to the underworld realm “police” who, on orders of higher officials, arrest and chain the souls of the living to lead them away to death.

The ritual techniques examined here imagine such a state: a constitutive presence at the center of the social world with an intimate relation to loss. In these rites, the state is found to be a strange image, abstract and uncanny, divided from this world as shade is from sunlight, as insubstantial as it is omnipresent. It is sensed as an absent subject, from which issue acts and commands governed by alien principals, like omens that bridge the gulf between this world and the underworld to bring muffled messages from the dead. The nationscape is a body, ordered spatially and morally like a digestive tract, the nearby mountains at its head and the governing cities at its excretory end. The imagined state has a proper place, at the bottom of the digestive tract. Its strange powers come from beyond even there, in the absolute otherness of the sky and sea, from whence descend the calamities of mass starvation, suicide, or violent death. To imagine the state in this way is to find it to be at once remote and intimate, at once alien and familiar. The body of the nation can be mapped onto individual bodies, the digestive flow of its rivers onto corporeal digestive tracts. Ritual techniques for healing find the body and the national landscape to coexist as a single, extended,

“collective unity of habitations” (Stein 1957a, 1957b; Boltz 1983). To heal physical or psychic pain is to reorder this unity. It is to release the knots or reversals in the body’s flows; it is to locate a habitable place in a morally ordered national landscape and to guide violence and loss back toward their origins at the rivers’ ends.



Enunciated in the ritual languages of healing, such images of state and nation shaped the stories people in this community told about how wounds treated with ritual had been inflicted. This book retells many such stories. To make them intelligible, I have recast them in the standard chronological framework through which we are accustomed to viewing the great transformations of rural Chinese society in the twentieth century’s last half: Liberation, land reform, collectivization, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the revival of household cultivation, market reforms, birth planning campaigns. This framework is the effect of an official perspective on time that structures both scholarship in the West and histories produced within Chinese state agencies. From this perspective, the state appears in its conventional guise: institutions, processes, policies, projects. I use this framework as a device for translation. My objective is to show how stories of past events were used to assemble an oppositional practice of time, a practice that deliberately undermined the temporality of official history. To be intelligible as historical practice, however, these stories must be translated through a more familiar vocabulary. The outlines of an alternative temporal strategy emerge from the dissonances of translation, its incapacity to fully render narrated memories as simple instances of a known history, subject to a familiar temporality. I employ this procedure because it seems to me that the alternative is to cast what is strange in these narratives outside history altogether—as effects of the tellers’ personal vagaries or as simple instances of the “popular beliefs” (or, as the official voices of the Chinese state still render them, “superstitions”) of a marginal people.

The stories I retell here persistently raise questions about what it means to live as a community in the aftermath of violence—in particular, the violence of hunger in the Great Leap famine and of revenge in the Cultural Revolution. They converge on a dream of community—a bad dream, embodied in the life, death, and ghostly revenance of a single local institution. This institution was called the *ts’ici* by local people and a Ch. *huoton* by outside officials and scholars. Oral accounts of the

ts'ici of the 1930s and 1940s described it as an arrangement by which a title and a well-defined set of political and ritual responsibilities rotated yearly among the area's most affluent households. The *ts'ici* system distributed the burdens and risks of hosting influential and demanding outsiders among these wealthiest community members. Each year, the household that accepted the title of *ts'ici* became a kind of guest house, where visiting officials and soldiers were lodged well, fed abundantly, entertained politely, and sent quickly on their way. The host household provided a stage on which the region's local despot judged disputes among community members; it fed and lodged prisoners arrested by agents of the local state; and it carried letters, repaired footpaths, and buried dead outsiders. It also sponsored a yearly cycle of public rituals for a family of collective ancestors. Many of its expenses were paid with the harvest of a collectively held and communally farmed ancestral estate, a fertile swath of rice land.

People in Zhizuo remembered the *ts'ici* as creating a homelike community, descended from a single apical ancestor and bound together in a circle of affinal relations. Their stories of the socialist period lingered over the slow disintegration, traumatic killing, and ghostly rebirth of the *ts'ici*. In the 1950s, local agents of the new state quickly took over most of the *ts'ici*'s political functions. The circle of affluent residents who had elected the host households was decimated, some executed as counter-revolutionaries, many attacked as landlords and rich peasants. Still, people in Zhizuo found ways to keep the *ts'ici* alive throughout the 1950s, as land and labor were collectivized. In 1965, shortly before the advent of the Cultural Revolution, this embattled emblem of community was ritually killed at a theatrical mass meeting. This killing transformed the family of collective ancestors into a cabal of wild ghosts, which haunted the community for the next thirty years. During the Cultural Revolution, these ghosts killed off those held responsible for the *ts'ici*'s destruction and the devastation of the Great Leap famine; during the period of national reconciliation and market reforms, they continued their depredations in other forms.

Taken together, such stories about the *ts'ici* constitute a narrative of a tortured relationship between a wounded community and an imagined state. In this narrative, the state gradually transforms itself from a personified external Other into an abstract internal Other. The *ts'ici* system remembered from the 1940s kept the violent and tattered Republican state outside and at a distance by inviting its agents within, moving them on their way, and managing the social and moral threats their incursions

entailed. In the 1950s, the socialist state efficiently penetrated this community, installing itself within, as the center of production and social reproduction. By the time of the Great Leap famine, this center had revealed itself as hollow, a spectral presence whose essence was felt in endless demands for grain and praise. During the Cultural Revolution, this ghostly state was seen to possess the bodies of ambitious activists and fearful officials (such as Li Yun), who used their mouths to voice its slogans and demands. Later, after collective land had been divided among households, the state was found to be obsessively concerned with human reproduction—it was seen to penetrate to the most intimate core of body and community: fertile and infertile wombs. As they show the state attaining an ever more invasive presence at the core of lived social and corporeal worlds, these stories describe it as ever more abstract, ever more difficult to grasp in concrete, human terms. This rift between the state's presence at the intimate core of the social and corporeal worlds and the growing difficulties of imagining it concretely inflected many aspects of social life in the early 1990s, the period of my fieldwork.

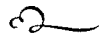
Several of the coming chapters show this narrative emerging with many diversions, contradictions, and ironies from nostalgic stories about a dream of lost community, bitter stories about hunger and injustice, comic stories about ghostly possession and toppling buildings, serious stories about killings and suicides, anxious stories about surgeons' scalpels and dying wombs. The question that dominates these chapters is, why this narrative? What did these stories, structured in this particular fashion, do? My answer, arrived at only gradually, is that they produced an oppositional practice of time and an alternative mode of history. This was a critical history, a calculated mistranslation of the constitutive questions about the social world that the state was heard to pose and answer. It was a history of an alternative kind of *doing* (to echo Castoriadis again), a subversive embodiment of alternative questions and answers about the ways a human community articulates with its lived world. I read these stories as efforts to find ways to live together in a community rent by past violence, as attempts to trace the responsibility for violence to its morally ambiguous origins, as struggles to enunciate calls for justice and to articulate longings for reconciliation. In this sense, I read them as means for creating collective ethical responses to past violence and its inevitable returns to the present and the future.

This is also an ethnography of place. It is a record of my own efforts to understand how people *inhabit* particular places—how habitable places are made in language and in the material world and how they become foundations for social being. To this end, I have structured this book as a journey through places I found people to inhabit intensely. This journey begins (in chapter 2) with an afflicted body, the dwelling place for an improbable entity: the soul of an animal destined to be reborn repeatedly as a stillborn fetus. I suggest that this body is not simply contained within its inhabited world like an egg in a basket; rather, it is involved with the world in a mutual interleaving of place and flesh. This theme is revised and complicated several times as the journey continues. The next stage (chapter 3) is a tour through the close domestic places of houses. I investigate houses not as simple containers for lives but as material foundations for social relations that could not exist in the same way without them. Then (in chapters 4 and 5) houses open up into a valley and its surroundings. I suggest that people fashion their closely inhabited landscape on the model of a house; it is the place-foundation for a houselike community, always in disintegration and always being reconstituted through the work of memory. From the known landscape, the journey ventures onto paths that link the closely inhabited world with the imagined nation and cosmos (chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9). The directions of these paths and the flow of traffic along them situate a lived community in this more expansive imagined space. These are paths of danger and healing; they are the routes along which the worst calamities enter the lived world—yet they are walked also by people in search of relief or reconciliation.

This journey inverts a common trope of ethnography, the trope of the “setting.” Much ethnographic writing finds place to be a container for social being or a surface on which social life is played out. Ethnographies in this mode often begin with a “setting” chapter, which dispenses with the question of where the subjects of the inquiry are located in place and time. In contrast, this question animates this entire book. Neither place nor time is given in nature or by power; both are made. People are subject to the economic and political geographies that shape landscapes, but they are actively subject; they refashion these geographies locally and find their own routes through them. So too with the dominant architectures of time. My ambition is to keep the questions of where and when alive throughout this work.

Like most ethnographic ambitions, however, this one can be realized only in small part. Again, this is a work of translation: everything it com-

municates must move first through familiar vocabularies; it repeatedly imposes conventional spatial and temporal contextualizations in order to let unconventional understandings of place and time emerge in an intelligible way. I would like to stop there, allowing orientations in time and space to unfold gradually in the journey from body through house, valley, and imagined nation, but I know this would make some of what follows less readable, especially to those less familiar with China. So a few pages of “setting” follow. Much of what they state will be expanded and complicated in further chapters.



Zhizuo comprises some twenty-four villages and hamlets built on the slopes of a small mountain valley and its tributaries. These valleys lie in the Baicaolin Mountains, part of a vast chain of mountain ranges that forms the frontier between two of the economic and physiographic macroregions into which G. William Skinner (1977, 1985) divides China—and which scholars of China across many disciplines have found to be indispensable aids to analysis. These are the Yungui macroregion, covering most of Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces, and the Upper Yangtze macroregion, coinciding largely with Sichuan Province. Skinner notes that each of these regional systems has a core-periphery structure with further, internal cores and peripheries. In general, key resources such as arable land, population, and capital investment are concentrated in the lowland riverine core areas. Agriculture is more intensive there, transport more efficient, economic transactions more dense, towns and cities closer together; all these goods thin out toward the mountainous peripheries (Skinner 1997). Zhizuo is triply peripheral in this regional-systems methodology. It lies in a peripheral region of the nationally peripheral Yungui macroregion, an area now known as Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture. It is perched on this prefecture’s northern edge, in mountains that divide two of its economically least significant counties, Dayao and Yongren. During the twentieth century, Zhizuo was swapped several times between these counties; today it lies mostly in Yongren.⁴

The occupants of these mountains have long been marked as different from their lowland neighbors by their language, customs, clothing, and “character.” In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their Chinese-speaking neighbors knew them as Luoluo. The Dayao County gazetteer of 1825 called them White Luoluo to distinguish them from the Black Luoluo living in the Liangshan Mountains to the north. Unlike

the latter, the gazetteer noted, they were little trouble to administer. They did not often engage in banditry, and they did not raid lowland villages for slaves; they were poor, timid, and peaceable: “The White Luoluo are tame and foolish of character. The men wrap their heads, go barefoot, and throw a black goatskin over their shoulders; the women plait their hair. Occasionally men and women come into town to sell hempen cloth, hempen thread, honey, and pitch pine” (DXZ 1825, 7,1b). In 1922, the gazetteer of Yanfeng County, established eleven years earlier to administer the salt mines where many men from these mountains worked as porters, made similar observations about these people, calling them Yi and describing a few of their “customs”: “The Yi men dress in goatskins and hempen cloth; the women are distinguished by cloth capes on their backs and also by goatskins. They live in grass-roofed houses or houses roofed with wooden shingles. Men and women are free to choose marriage partners. When they fall ill, they don’t use medicine; they do a sorcerer’s dance and chant, and that is enough” (YXZ 1922, 3,61b).

Apart from such brief characterizations, the local histories and gazetteers of the late Qing and Republican years took little notice of these people. Still, administrators did remark on one aspect of their lives: many of their villages appeared to form cooperative associations, founded on land held in common. In 1912, negotiators attempting to resolve a dispute over the boundary between Dayao and Yanfeng Counties took note of one such group of Luoluo villages in the border area, in a place called Liushutang: “These five small villages and the seven small villages on the road to the temple make up a *huotou* territory. This is a community organization. Up and down the road they hold real estate in common, and when they encounter disaster, they distribute its burdens” (YXZ 1922, 1,16a). The existence of this “community organization” supported an argument that these villages should not be split up but should instead belong as a unit to one of the two disputing counties. In these mountains, administrators noted, many groups of villages were united in similar *huotou* territories, with land held in common and rules that rotated ritual and political responsibilities among villages and households.

More detailed descriptions of these mountain residents did not appear until the 1950s, when the new socialist government conducted a series of social history projects among the nation’s “minority” peoples.⁵ About two hundred investigators, trained in the Soviet model of ethnography, descended upon China’s mountainous and border areas to study the culture and society of non-Han peoples. At least two separate

teams assembled reports on the history, folklore, and economic circumstances of people living in the Baicaolin Mountains. Like the compilers of gazetteers and local histories before them, these ethnographers noticed many cooperative associations with elected heads and common funds of grain and land used for collective rituals (YSB 1986, 109, 111). They too remarked that locals treated death, illness, and affliction with “sorcerer’s chants” directed to a bewildering variety of nonhuman entities. One team collected some such chants from Zhizuo and its environs, compiled them with songs and chants from nearby regions, and translated them into Chinese; the text that resulted remains the most comprehensive written record of this area’s extraordinary oral literature (YSMWCD 1959).

These efforts were part of a nationwide project to systematically assign official “nationality” designations to all the non-Han groups in China. In this task, ethnographers were initially guided by Joseph Stalin’s four criteria for defining a unique nationality: common language, common territory, common economic base, and common psychological character (Fei 1980). Among the varied and scattered peoples of the southwest, however, most of these criteria proved impractical, and investigators of the peoples formerly called Luoluo largely abandoned their use. Chinese scholars had dreamed for two decades of discovering a common historical relationship among these peoples; the ethnologists of the 1950s continued this work by tracing genetic relationships among linguistic vocabularies and cultural traits to assemble most into a single “nationality” (Harrell 1995). They gave this group the name “Yi”—pronounced the same as the term “Yi” that had once been applied generally to non-Han peoples in the southwest, but written with a less derogatory character. This is now among the largest and least well understood of the “minority nationalities” on China’s official list of fifty-five, with a current population of more than six million.

Linguists in the 1950s distinguished six mutually unintelligible dialects spoken by Yi peoples. The speakers of the Northern dialect proved most problematic for the socialist state, and only they have been objects of substantial social or historical research. Notorious for enslaving their neighbors, many clans of Northern dialect speakers resisted incursions of the People’s Liberation Army into stronghold territories in Sichuan’s Liangshan Mountains until 1956, when they were pacified and their slaves liberated.⁶ Speakers of the other five dialects have been written about very little in Chinese and almost not at all in Western languages.⁷ Despite great historical and cultural differences among Yi groups, even

the best descriptions of minority languages and cultures in English still take Northern dialect speakers as representative of Yi. Most describe this “nationality” in blanket terms as descendants of the famous “independent Luoluo” and as organized into exogamous clans and strictly divided into endogamous and hierarchical castes, including noble “Black Yi,” commoner “White Yi,” and slaves (see, for example, Ramsey 1987). At best, this applies only to the minority of Yi who speak the Northern dialect and reside mainly in Sichuan’s Liangshan Prefecture and Yunnan’s Ninglang County. Baicaolin Mountain residents, like most of the varied peoples called Yi who are scattered throughout Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi Provinces, have been under state rule for centuries and have never had exogamous clans, caste hierarchies, or slaves.

Most residents of the Baicaolin range speak what is now known as the Central dialect of Yi. Some linguists have noted that this dialect is much closer to the language of another “nationality,” Lisu, than to any other Yi dialect (Bradley 1978). Chinese ethnographers have divided Central dialect speakers into Lipo and Luoluopo (omitting the offensive “dog” radical from the first two characters), according to dialect differences and reported self-appellations (Yang H. 1990, 117). The non-Han residents of the Baicaolin are classed as Lipo, a group that numbers about ninety-four thousand people. While many in Zhizuo were pleased to claim kinship with other Central dialect speakers in the surrounding mountains, they rejected as ridiculous the notion that they could share a “nationality” with Northern dialect speakers, who once preyed on their villages as bandits and still ate like barbarians, tearing chunks of meat from the bone without chopsticks. Most applied the term “Yi” to themselves only when traveling or speaking Chinese to outsiders. They found the designation “Lipo” more accurate: many traced their ancestry to people they called Líp’ò (in their own language) from a few valleys to the south. Nevertheless, most were agreed, the proper appellation for non-Han in the Zhizuo *ts’ici* (or *huotou*) was not Líp’ò but Lòlop’ò or, more formally, Lòlop’ò Lòlomo, “Lòlo men and women.” And the language spoken in this region should be called Lòlongo, “Lòlo language.” These terms, Zhizuo residents insisted, were unrelated to the contemporary Chinese appellation “Luoluo.” They derived instead from *lò*, an ancient word for “ox” or “tiger,” still used in ritual language. Of course, all these claims were inflected by the discourse on “nationalities”; during the period of my fieldwork, some in Zhizuo were pushing the idea that Lòlop’ò should be considered its own nationality, the nation’s smallest, exclusive to the occupants of the Zhizuo *ts’ici*. About 5 percent of Zhizuo

residents considered themselves not Lòlop'ò but Han (or Cep'ò). Many formerly Han families had become Lòlop'ò after moving to Zhizuo; these remaining Han spoke Lòlongo as their first language, intermarried with their Lòlop'ò neighbors, and found themselves hard pressed to preserve their Han identity.



These mountains, with their high elevations, narrow valleys, and deeply peripheral situation, have always been a difficult place to make a living. The 1950s ethnographers found most families getting by on a mixture of farming, goat herding, and household-based hempen cloth production. Zhizuo's central valley lay on a trade route from the nearby salt wells of Baijing⁸ to the lowlands. During the Republican era, many men worked as porters or muleteers along this route, but these opportunities melted away in the 1950s as the salt business was brought under firmer state control. Land in these mountains was divided between precious irrigated paddy land on the valley floors for rice and winter wheat; unirrigated terraces for maize, wheat, and barley on hillsides near the villages; and swidden land for oats, buckwheat, potatoes, and hemp higher in the mountains. Land of all classes was scarce. Before the land reform movement, a few landlord households produced enough grain on their own land to feed their numbers for the entire year. Afterward, however, virtually no household could feed itself entirely on its own land (of about 2.1 *mu*⁹ per capita); all supplemented their grain income with hempen cloth production.¹⁰ These mountains had long been renowned in Yunnan for the quality and quantity of their hempen cloth; during the first three decades of socialism, more hempen cloth flowed from here than from any other part of the province. Women raised hemp on swidden acreage high in the mountains; soaked and washed it in the cold streams; pounded, boiled, spun, and wove it in their courtyards; and sold it to state-run supply and marketing cooperatives to make grain bags.

From 1952 to 1978, the state subsidized hemp prices relative to prices for grain and cotton. High hemp prices brought unprecedented prosperity to these mountains for nearly three decades, in a period when real incomes for most peasants in China were stagnating and declining. But this good fortune ended with market reforms. In 1978, the state raised prices for grain; in 1980, it instituted a floating price for hemp procurement. China had begun to produce synthetic fibers in the 1970s, and one of their earliest uses was to replace hemp in bags for grain and fertilizer.

Hemp prices plunged more than 12 percent in one year, and they never recovered. By the early 1980s, households in the Baicaolin Mountains could not sell hempen cloth for any price.

Hempen cloth production, like cotton production in the Yangze Delta, had encouraged population growth and made grain land even more scarce. In the 1980s and 1990s, Zhizuo residents farmed about .93 *mu* per capita of unirrigated land and .36 *mu* per capita of irrigated land.¹¹ Most households could grow enough grain on this land to suffice for about half the year; nearly all relied heavily on state relief grain. Some households raised herds of black-haired goats; some had a few walnut trees; many harvested timber illegally from higher in the mountains; a handful opened tiny shops or developed businesses as tinkers; the most fortunate produced educated sons and daughters who found work in lowland towns or cities and sent money home. Everyone ate two meals a day, usually of steamed grain with a soup of boiled greens on the side. Most households killed one small pig a year, salted its meat, and used it sparingly in cooking for the entire year. On special occasions, people killed a chicken, burned off its feathers, and boiled it in a soup. At weddings and funerals, goats were slaughtered and eaten in quantity. During the rainy season, however, when the fall harvest was but a dim memory and relief grain was running out, many people routinely went hungry.

The rapid economic expansion that transformed many parts of China in the 1980s and 1990s bestowed few benefits on this deep periphery. By the mid-1990s, Zhizuo still had no village industries and no legal sideline occupations that turned a profit. One youth had a tape deck on which he recorded courting songs; three or four families had battery-powered radios. Some houses sported electric lines—the remains of past, failed attempts to electrify villages by installing small generators in mountain streams—but not a single house had electricity. Although pipelines had been installed from mountainside springs to tanks in the centers of the largest villages, many of the pipes were broken, and residents walked the steep, root-strewn paths to draw water from the streams. Zhizuo residents had expended immense effort during the Great Leap Forward to build a road to span the twenty-five steep kilometers from the township center, but it was rough and dangerous, and the only vehicles to bounce up it were the jeeps of county officials on their semiannual visits. For most people, life was growing gradually harder, as prices rose and entitlements for free medical care and education disintegrated.

After following Li Yun to Zhizuo, I settled on the valley's populous "sunny side" in an elementary school that served the entire brigade. I lived there for thirteen months. It had taken me repeated visits to Yunnan over four years and many months of negotiation to be allowed to do extended fieldwork in a single location, and throughout my stay I was always uncertain how long I would be allowed to continue. For the first six months, in adherence to regulations governing foreign field researchers in China, I was accompanied by one of two "companions" (Ch. *peitong*) who had been assigned to facilitate my research and report back to my sponsoring institutions, the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Chuxiong Yi Culture Research Institute, on its progress and results. After six months, I was quietly allowed to continue research on my own.¹² I occupied a small, earth-floored room, separated from a roomful of sixth-grade boys by a wall of planks and newspapers and overlooking a courtyard that filled several times a day with cheerful schoolchildren. I could not have found a more auspicious place to live. My first friends were children, who laughed at my stumbling Lòlongo, offered me gifts of sunflower seeds, and competed to take me home for dinner. Their trust was the foundation for all the conversations with their parents and other kin around which this book is built.

I often sat outside the school gate in the evening with a friend or two, watching the sunlight melt off the mud-brick houses on the opposite slope. The fields below gleamed jewel-bright, while dark figures trudged up the paths toward home. One of the ritual poems I had begun to learn (quoted in chapter 2) described this view: "Look over at that slope, only cliffs and caves; look at this slope, only thorns and brambles; not land enough to turn a plow, not land enough to place a sieve, rocks below the feet, cliffs at every corner." It was a bitter place to live, all its inhabitants agreed. Yet many also seemed to believe that no other place was anything like it: in no other place were words and things so close to each other, shadowing each other, completing each other. The warp and woof of lived experience here—upstream and downstream, this slope and that slope, sunny side and shady side—were the cloth on which the poetic languages of healing, courtship, mourning, and pain needled their intricate embroidery. This tree up here, that rock down there, this courtyard, that wall—each breathed a history of words, formal and informal, fluent and chaotic, secret and available, accordant and contested. One could sit up here like this and listen to the fields and slopes below speak one's histories and those of others, with their comings and goings,

deaths and wounds, bitter rifts and healing accords. I know this because it is from such a perch that many of the stories in this book began, as someone pointed out a house, a gully, a grave, or a deforested slope and began to talk about it. It was a difficult place to live: high, poor, cold, far from the luxuries of cities and markets, and in troubled relation to the nation below. It was even an accursed place, as chapters 6 and 8 will show. But it was a place that, in being lived so intimately and known so well, offered its inhabitants abundant resources for engaging with the afflictions, uncertainties, and consolations of memory.



“Why study a minority when we still know so little about the Han?” an eminent economic historian of China once asked me. “It’s all very interesting, but is it China?” commented an ascendant anthropologist of China after a presentation on ritual in Zhizuo. Historians and anthropologists have long imagined China to form a cultural whole. The classic anthropology of China, which has taught us most of what we know about “Chinese culture,” made this a founding principle. To study any village, no matter how peripheral—and most were in the far peripheries of Taiwan and Hong Kong’s New Territories—was to investigate a culture common to the Chinese people. For anthropologists, this common cultural core was first captured in the conceptual triune of Chinese lineage, Chinese household, and Chinese family, brilliantly described by Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966). Feminist anthropologists have long since dismantled Freedman’s triune, but the idea of a common cultural core has continued to infuse much anthropology of China, sometimes as a foil against which to bring out local differences, sometimes as a resource to fill in gaps in analysis. The idea of a Han nation (Ch. *minzu*) as the carrier of this common culture was invented by Sun Yatsen and other nation builders during the Republic; later, anthropologists in search of “Chinese culture” accepted this idea almost without questioning it.

Many still assume that an ethnography of any locale is relevant or interesting only insofar as it sheds light on this cultural whole. Studies of people now identified as “minority nationalities,” it is assumed, can make little contribution to this enterprise. These peoples are either culturally distinct and thus not “Chinese,” or they are in the process of being “sinicized” and thus neither reliable representatives of Chinese culture nor very interesting on their own. In this context, the ethnogra-

phy of “minority” peoples in China has taken two predominant forms. In the West, most of such work is about ethnicity. It delineates cultural and linguistic differences among ethnic groups, elucidates the processes by which ethnic difference is created in dialogue with the Chinese state, and shows how Han have attained a unified ethnic identity by marking off “minorities” as exotic others.¹³ The other form of ethnography investigates a “minority” as a cultural isolate, making no claims to contribute to knowledge about “Chinese culture.” In China, this is an industry: “ethnic studies” (Ch. *minzuxue*) departments of universities and research institutes now churn out descriptions of every officially defined nationality, emphasizing the attributes that distinguish them from Han.¹⁴

Recent scholarship has begun to show that the cultural features we identify as “Chinese” have multiple historical origins, including contributions from different ethnicities within and outside China (see Rawski 1996 for a review). This scholarship dismantles the notion of “Chinese culture” as a unity belonging to a Han people engaged in a long historical process of converting to this culture each of the various non-Han peoples within their realm. It allows us to think instead of an open and flexible field of cultural practices, fashioned in the interactions of many different peoples. This field is not centered on any single deep-seated common cultural core; it is historically and regionally diverse, and it ranges across ethnic and national boundaries. In this view, present-day “minority nationalities” are neither outside a cohesive entity called “Chinese culture” nor in any simple process of being assimilated by it. Instead, these peoples seed a diverse cultural field with fresh influences; they selectively appropriate its elements, reworking or embellishing them; they imagine coherent versions of it against which to pose self-consciously, inventing themselves as different.

I take the subjects of my inquiry to be participants in such a field. Lòlop’ò in Zhizuo see themselves as no less “Chinese” than any of their neighbors, yet they also believe themselves to occupy a unique and troubled place within the Chinese nation. Their experience as participants in late twentieth-century China has been dominated by the same massive political and economic transformations that have shaped the lives of people throughout the countryside, yet they have drawn on distinctive cultural resources to respond to these transformations in uncommon ways. Readers familiar with scholarship on Chinese culture will recognize much about them, yet they will also find much of what they recognize to be distorted or amplified in ways that make it seem strange. Note

that all of this might also be said of any of the rural people in the People's Republic about whom anthropologists have recently written as, in some way, representative.¹⁵ In this sense, Zhizuo might be seen as just one more locale in the vast and diverse landscape of rural China, neither typical nor unique, neither marginal nor central. As an ethnography of such a place, this book is not limited to exploring "ethnicity" or to investigating practices assumed to be interesting because they are distinct. Still, to write of a people presumed to be different is to feel some special restraints. The most obvious is that "Chinese culture" cannot be invoked to explain local practices or fill in ethnographic lapses. I have found this restraint to be productive. It has forced me to give closer attention to the specificities of daily practice, and it has granted me the freedom to let my questions emerge from the local ethnographic terrain. But it has also constrained me to search for other means to show how this local terrain articulates itself with the whole that "China" is imagined to be. The questions about transactions between daily practices and the imagined state and nation that animate this inquiry have emerged from this mix of freedom and constraint.



The first half of this book explores closely inhabited places and dreams of domestic community. Chapter 2 tells of Li Qunhua's troubled dreams during a birth planning campaign, of how she found these dreams to be caused by the soul of a domestic animal lodged in her womb, and of the ritual that drove this thing out of her body and house. This story introduces one of the book's central themes: how people inhabit their most intimate surroundings in the face of loss or violence. Chapter 3 broadens the investigation of domestic space. It uses houses and their representations in material and poetic languages to describe the flow of social relations through intimately inhabited places. The next two chapters use stories of Zhizuo's *ts'ici* system of the 1930s and 1940s to show how people modeled dreams of a larger domestic community on houses. Chapter 4 retells some of these stories, while chapter 5 looks at the ritual forms that accompanied them to examine ideas about memory and representation. The book's second half explores the infirmity, death, and rebirth of this dream of community. Chapter 6 relates stories of the first decade after Liberation, beginning with the new state's deliberate conquest of intensely inhabited places in the early 1950s and culminating in the Great Leap famine of 1958–1960. This unforgettable catastrophe commenced

the “age of wild ghosts,” forever transforming the character of community in this place. Chapter 7 investigates the rites of exorcism with which people traced the double origins of pain and loss to the famine dead and the imagined state. Chapter 8 picks up the narrative of the *ts’ici* system once more, showing how people used stories of its traumatic death and reappearance as a cabal of vengeful ghosts to explore themes of community and justice. The concluding chapter returns to the theme of birth planning. It tells the story of a campaign in which more than eighty women in Zhizuo were forcibly sterilized and the active resistance this campaign engendered. This story gathers and sharpens the questions of place, memory, violence, and community that have inspired this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Valley House

In 1953, a team of ethnographers, taking part in a nationwide ethnic identification project, visited the village of Yijichang in Yongren County.¹ Their report analyzed patterns of land use, relations of exploitation, and local government structure in this area before Liberation and identified its people as members of the newly constituted Yi nationality. The pre-Liberation local state hierarchy, the report stated, had here, as elsewhere, been an instrument of direct oppression, designed to extract wealth from the people through taxes and corvée labor. In the late Qing and Republican years, the first level of this oppressive hierarchy had been an institution unique to this part of Yunnan. It was called a *huoton*, and it administered a small group of Yi villages. Of the Yijichang *huoton*, the report declared:

It is said that in Yijichang in the late Qing and early Republic, the positions of *huoton* and so forth [in the hierarchy of local government] were dominated by local tyrants and evil gentry. After the county reform [in 1925], corvée and grain taxes gradually increased . . . and the *huoton* seized every opportunity to blackmail the people. After 1935, corvée and grain taxes grew ever deeper. . . . The suffering of poor laborers and peasants was extremely heavy. Each change or continuity at this basic level of the puppet state followed its need to oppress and exploit the peasants. (YSB 1986, 109)

In the 1990s, thirty years had passed since the last remnants of *huoton* in northern Yunnan had been dismantled. Yet in Zhizuo, a long day's walk from Yijichang, recollections of the *huoton* remained at the heart of a prolonged and complex struggle over collective memory. Party and

government cadres in Yongren still held to the view that the several *huotou* systems in the county had been the lowest level of an oppressive administrative hierarchy dominated by “local tyrants and evil gentry,” their chief purpose the extraction of corvée, taxes, and military conscripts from an unwilling populace. But many in Zhizuo vigorously protested this characterization. They spoke of their *huotou* (called the *ts’ici* in their own language) as their ancestors’ cleverest invention, designed to insulate their community from the worst caprices of local officials and state agencies.

In northern Yunnan, *huotou* were found where concentrations of those who spoke the Central dialect of Yi resided along important trading routes or in close proximity to administrative centers. Officials and soldiers who traveled through these areas frequently descended on relatively affluent households to demand their most lavish hospitality. In mountain communities, where even the wealthiest had few resources, such hospitality could well ruin the host. *Huotou* systems apportioned the responsibility for hosting outsiders, rotating it yearly among the community’s most prosperous households. Host households also took on other tasks, such as feeding and clothing prisoners, delivering letters, repairing roads, burying unclaimed corpses, and sponsoring communal agricultural rituals. As Zhizuo residents remembered it in the 1990s, their *ts’ici* system had drawn them into a domestic community similar to that of a house. It had made a common residence of their mountainous landscape, created a common ancestry for people of diverse origins, involved them in common financial and ritual enterprises, and passed on techniques for dealing with the powerful and troublesome visitors that any house must occasionally entertain. While their *ts’ici* could not diminish the force of the local state’s demands, it could at least distribute them evenly among those best able to bear them.

Despite harsh judgments of the *ts’ici* by ethnographers and land reform work teams, the socialist government did not immediately do away with it after gaining control of northern Yunnan. The new township government arrogated the host household’s administrative responsibilities, but it allowed Zhizuo residents to continue to elect *ts’ici* each year and to use the harvest of the land in their ancestral trust to support public rituals. Most of this land was collectivized in 1956, but a portion of about 1 *mu* continued to rotate with the title of *ts’ici* among production teams. This diminished *ts’ici* system lasted until 1965, when political activists seized its central emblem and polluted it with menstrual blood. In the years that followed, it became clear to many in Zhizuo that this act

had transformed a family of apical ancestors into a cabal of “wild ghosts.” During the Cultural Revolution, these ghosts methodically killed off those who had governed Zhizuo through the disastrous Great Leap famine, and they continued to prey on cadres and peasants through the early 1990s. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 show how people used stories of these depredations to distribute responsibility for the wounds and losses suffered in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution between the imagined state, with its distant centers of power, and their own neighbors and kin. Talk of the *ts’ici* ghosts, I argue, helped people reconstitute an agonistic sense of community in the face of their own shared responsibility for past violence.

This chapter and the next set the stage for this discussion by representing a vision of the *ts’ici* system that ritual experts and members of former host households presented to me, an outsider. Their specialized knowledge was at the heart of struggles over memories of the *ts’ici* after 1965. It gave such memories continuity and coherence, kept alive the possibility that the *ts’ici* might be reconstructed should local officials accede, and created a foundation for the politically sensitive claim that the area once administered by the *ts’ici* should be the territory of a distinct nationality. This knowledge formed the ground on which many in Zhizuo continued to nurture the ideal of a single, embrative domestic community, despite the deep conflicts that divided them.

This chapter explores talk of the responsibilities, ideal moral character, proscribed activities, and prescribed compensation of host households and their staff of five. Such accounts employed metaphors of procreation and moral ideas about speech, sexuality, and sociability to create an imagined unity under the former *ts’ici* for all who claimed to be Lòlop’ò. They made use of extended temporal and spatial homologies to associate the *ts’ici* with procreative force. In temporal terms, they drew parallels between giving birth and nurturing children and the communal work of farming rice to pay for the *ts’ici*’s social and ritual obligations; in spatial terms, they compared the bounded territory of Zhizuo to the *ts’ici*’s house, centered on a productive unity of ancestral spouses and troubled by a crowd of honored but potentially threatening guests. As Lévi-Strauss pointed out, house images frequently display the capacity to integrate diverse or mutually contradictory ideas and principles (1983, 1984; see also Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Following this suggestion, I argue that recollections of the *ts’ici* system used a series of inter-related house images—a reliquary box, the *ts’ici*’s house, the houselike valley—to fashion an inclusive domestic unity imagined to embrace all

Zhizuo residents and to exclude from household matters the powerful outsiders the system ostensibly served.

Re-Membering a Corpse

My own position as an outsider with putatively powerful connections to state agencies inevitably seemed to bring to mind the *ts'ici* system for my hosts in Zhizuo. The first to mention it to me was Qi Degui, a schoolteacher in his late forties. During my first week in Zhizuo, Qi Degui offered me a guest room in the elementary school. "Had you come before Liberation, we would have carried your luggage, feasted you every day, and gotten you drunk every night," he told me. "Now I can only give you a hard bed and a bowl of stale rice." Qi Degui was a frustrated intellectual. Although his education in the county's only middle school had been cut short by the Cultural Revolution, he still dreamed of scholarly accomplishment. He showed me his pride and joy: an article he had published in a single-issue journal on the history of Yongren County. Titled "The *huotou* system of the Yi of Zhizuo," it succinctly outlined the process for choosing a *ts'ici* household, sketched out the responsibilities once shared by this household and its staff of aides, and briefly mentioned the decline and demise of the *ts'ici* system. During my first weeks in Zhizuo, Qi Degui showed up at my schoolhouse room every morning to lecture me on the *ts'ici*. I had come to study religion? If I wanted to understand this nationality's religion, he said, I must begin by studying the *ts'ici*.

As my circle of acquaintances expanded, I found that my difficulties in explaining my purpose in Zhizuo often dissolved when I mentioned the *ts'ici*. Many regarded it as the feature that made Zhizuo Lòlop'ò noteworthy, the most obvious object of interest for an outsider. "Though it was destroyed a long time ago," a man of Qi Degui's generation asserted, "the *ts'ici* still exists in people's hearts. It is the heart of our nationality." A budding entrepreneur, who would have made an excellent candidate for *ts'ici*, was more explicit: "If the Communist Party were serious about restoring national customs, it would allow us to reinstate the *ts'ici*. After all, it is our nationality's most important custom." In the 1980s, the post-Mao regime had granted new legitimacy to such terms as "nationality" (Ch. *minzu*), "nationality religion" (Ch. *minzu zongjiao*), and "nationality customs" (Ch. *minzu fengsu*). By the early 1990s, some

in Zhizuo had begun to assert that their official nationality should be Lòlop'ò rather than Yi. Such claims were always founded on statements about the old *ts'ici*. The territory of the “Lòlop'ò nationality” was the region that had been governed by the *ts'ici*, its language was the dialect spoken in this region, and its distinguishing “religion” and “customs” were the rituals once associated with the *ts'ici*.

Most adults in Zhizuo were happy to talk about the *ts'ici* in these general terms, but they deferred specific questions to a small group of “experts.” These were men (and a few women) who had served as *ts'ici*, whose parents had served as *ts'ici*, or who had aided *ts'ici* with their ritual duties. In time, I had frequent conversations with these elderly people, who seemed to share the conviction that if Zhizuo had anything to offer a scholarly outsider, it was quite naturally knowledge of the *ts'ici* and the ritual obligations associated with it. In the biographies of many, the *ts'ici* system and its destruction had played an extraordinary, sometimes cataclysmic, role.

I came to know three of these experts particularly well. Li Yong's parents had served as *ts'ici* in 1929, when he was a child of nine. He recalled with relish the fanfare generated by officials and soldiers who came and went from his parents' courtyard. His father had belonged to a lineage of ritualists on whom other *ts'ici* relied to perform a cycle of communal rituals. In adolescence, Li Yong had trained with his father to learn the chants and gestures that gathered health and fertility from the surrounding valleys and towns and deposited them in the jewel-bright valley of Zhizuo. Li Yong considered Liberation to have been the abrupt finale of the *ts'ici* system. He refused to talk about the institution's post-1950 existence, saying only that it had been “hollow” (*kɔ*), devoid of meaning or interest. Li Yong was also diffident about his personal history, but I learned its bare outline from others. In the 1950s and 1960s, he had been assigned to a special production team reserved for rich peasants and former ritualists, who were given the worst food and the most difficult and degrading labor. In 1966, as the Cultural Revolution began, he was imprisoned and beaten daily by Red Guards for being a purveyor of superstition. Eloquent, arrogant, and alcoholic, Li Yong was proud of his precise and beautiful ritual chants. He insisted that he alone of all ritualists in Zhizuo remembered full and correct chants for the *ts'ici* spirits. For more than two months, he spent several afternoons a week with me, recording and explicating chants and outlining “rules and procedures” (*cìpɛ mope*). Perhaps more than any of my other informants, Li Yong seemed to regard the *ts'ici* as a closed system of rules, poetry, and gestures, a bounded

body of knowledge that could be passed on in full to an apprentice. After we recorded and discussed the last of his chants, he said he had nothing more to impart, and our discussions of the *ts'ici* ended, though we continued to meet to talk about other topics.

Qi Bao'en was in his mid-eighties, about ten years older than Li Yong. He was the gentlest of men, with a subtle wit. When I knew him, he could no longer navigate Zhizuo's steep paths, and we met in his courtyard or sat in the sun against a wall by his house. Qi Bao'en too was an accomplished ritualist, of another lineage patronized by *ts'ici*. His family had been classified as poor peasants during the land reform movement. In the decades preceding Liberation, service as *ts'ici* had been reserved for the wealthiest; in the 1950s, only those who were secure in the political legitimacy afforded by the label "poor peasant" or "agricultural laborer" volunteered for service. Qi Bao'en had served as *ts'ici* in 1954. In the years that followed, his household avoided the persecutions that wealthier former *ts'ici* suffered, and his son advanced to a position in the township government. Although Qi Bao'en himself was not persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, this son committed suicide. Qi Bao'en retained a living commitment to the rituals of the *ts'ici* system, a commitment forced on him by the ghosts the *ts'ici* spawned after its destruction. In 1980, his household contracted a parcel of land abutting the ancestral trust land. When the wild ghosts of the *ts'ici* began to kill off those who dared plant this land, Qi Bao'en protected his family by secretly propitiating its guardian spirit (the *Lòhə*). In the early 1990s, village cadres, caught up in a political crisis engendered by these killings, began to pay him to continue his propitiations.

The youngest expert on the *ts'ici* system was Qi Chun, in his late forties. His parents had been Zhizuo's last *ts'ici* couple, in 1964 and early 1965. Labeled "poor peasants," they had done well: Qi Chun's elder brother, Qi Lin, had graduated from middle school and become chief administrator of the People's Court in the county capital. In early 1965, under intense pressure from a work team of the Socialist Education campaign, Qi Lin had denounced his parents as the ringleaders of a "superstitious sect." This act quickly led to the final demise of the *ts'ici* system. Qi Chun kept the hempen costume his father had worn as *ts'ici*, and he donned it when an illness he attributed to the *ts'ici* ghosts flared up. His neighbors said that among the symptoms of his periodic possession was a compulsion to talk through the formal cycle of rituals the *ts'ici* had once sponsored. Qi Chun scoffed at this, but he admitted that he did like to talk about the *ts'ici* system to anyone who would listen. In our con-

versations, he carefully described the ritual cycle, beginning with rites performed at the new year and proceeding methodically through the calendar.

In remembering the *ts'ici* system of the 1930s and 1940s, individuals such as Li Yong, Qi Bao'en, and Qi Chun exhibited a "virtuosity in self description" that, as Webb Keane (1995, 102) notes, seems to characterize societies in which ritual oratory and formal discourse are strongly valued. Much of their speech about the *ts'ici* was formalized, consisting of lists of rules and procedures, poetic phrases from ritual chants, and reflexive exegetical commentary. Like many anthropologists blessed with highly articulate informants, I often listened to this discourse with a sense of unease. It seemed to refer to a timeless, bounded world that could have had no real existence in the violent, conflict-ridden, and rapidly changing context of early twentieth-century China. With only a few exceptions, my ritualist teachers did not admit to disagreement about ritual procedures or the roles of the *ts'ici* household and its staff; and, in the face of their authority, others rarely raised alternative views. In this talk, the *ts'ici* system took on a textlike legibility, eminently readable but divorced from the confusion and ambiguity of daily life. Still, the more I listened to these experts, the more evident it became that their passion for talking about this institution—and especially for talking about it with an outsider—did not emerge from simple nostalgia for a more ordered past. Discussions of the *ts'ici* were often occasions for other kinds of talk. Each of these individuals frequently dropped into their lists of rules or descriptions of rituals certain oblique references to the wounds and losses they and their families had suffered in the state campaigns that had shaped rural life over the past four decades.

It was not until many months into my stay that I began to understand the crucial connection between this talk of a lost past and the present concerns of people in Zhizuo. My circle of acquaintances widened, and I was invited to occasions such as funerals and exorcisms that people tried to shield from the eyes of most officials from outside. I fell ill with hepatitis, left Zhizuo for three months, and found on my return that many people took my reappearance as a sign of loyalty to my friends there. Perhaps crucially, I returned alone, no longer accompanied by the young research assistants from my sponsoring agency, whose presence had made some of my informants uneasy. People began to tell me, piecemeal, stories of the *ts'ici* system's destruction and the ghosts it had engendered. If recollections of the *ts'ici* of the 1930s and 1940s displayed the crystalline symmetry of a dead form, I realized, this was because it

was, emphatically, dead. It was a corpse, and talk about it was arranged with the same care given to aligning the limbs of a corpse in a coffin, shrouding it with new hempen and cotton clothing, and ritually smoothing away the blemishes of pain, hunger, wounds, tears, and grief that life had given it. But this corpse had not died well. It had been violently killed and, like the many souls killed by hunger just a few years before its death, it had returned. Stories of this return inflected nearly every aspect of the complex relationship between this always reemerging community and the socialist state.

The violently dead were double beings. On the one hand, they returned as wild ghosts to afflict their descendants with pain and death; on the other, like any other ascendant, they were released as ancestral souls, gathered from mountain slopes, and given a place at the bed's head, where they became sources of fertility and domestic unity. Memories of the *ts'ici* system of the 1930s and 1940s were similarly double. On the one hand, they made possible ghost stories through which Zhizuo residents patched together a conflicted common sense of their place as a living community in the landscape of the socialist nation. On the other hand, these recollections preserved a compact, formal diagram of social relations, like an ancestral effigy, which, it was hoped, might be a source of health and unity for a domestic community. In both senses, talk of the *ts'ici* amounted to a powerful strategy of self-representation. The *ts'ici* had once been a means of mobilizing common productive resources to represent Zhizuo as a coherent, united, houselike community both to its members and to powerful outsiders. Thirty years after the *ts'ici*'s demise, people in Zhizuo reengaged this strategy. Their talk about the *ts'ici* was an effort to retrieve control over collective self-representation from the state agencies who had been charged with promoting and distributing the official revitalization of "nationality customs" and "nationality religion."

Those Who Can Bear It

In the last two decades of the Republic, about fifteen hundred people lived in Zhizuo's villages and hamlets. The largest villages formed a rough oval around the central valley, with its stretch of irrigated rice paddy land. A footpath, paved with stone in the steepest places, followed the stream into this valley from the south, skirted the

large villages on the sunny side, and exited through a steep canyon to the north. This path linked two county centers, the towns of Dayao and Yongren (see Figure 4.1).

A variety of armies traveled these mountains, forcibly recruiting soldiers and requisitioning grain, money, livestock, and corvée labor. Between 1915 and 1929, warlord armies from Sichuan and Yunnan passed through the tiny county of Yongren on Zhizuo's northern border at least eight times, requisitioning nearly 2 million yuan and grain worth over 800 Ch. *liang* of silver. The People's Liberation Army passed through twice on its Long March, attacking and briefly occupying the town of Dayao early in 1935 and returning in 1936. In 1938, the Burma Road became South China's only conduit for supplies from the West to keep alive the Guomindang's resistance against the Japanese. This road passed far to the south of Zhizuo, but a branch road was built through Dayao and Yongren Counties to link the Burma Road to the Guomindang bases in Sichuan. The heavy military, administrative, and civilian traffic on this road often spilled onto the footpath through Zhizuo. In the 1940s, the Nationalist government's forced military conscription bore heavily on both counties, and groups of soldiers passed through Zhizuo to hunt down youths who sought to evade the draft. Finally, in 1948 and 1949, the Communist Party underground carried out a series of armed rebellions in the area, and "Communist bandits," Guomindang regulars, and militia units fought pitched battles in Zhizuo and the surrounding mountains (CYZZ 1993, 148–151).

In addition to this formidable military traffic, local officials and police stopped in Zhizuo to oversee conscription and tax collection, recruit corvée labor, settle disputes, arrest criminals, or rest on the road between county towns. Zhizuo was located in Dayao's northernmost district (*qu*). In the period of instability that preceded the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, an ethnically Han merchant named Xia had seized control of this district and had given himself the title of Ch. *tusi*. *Tusi*, who were hereditary officials in regions inhabited by non-Han peoples, maintained varying degrees of independence from provincial and central state bureaucracies.² Until 1949, the Xia family controlled their mountainous realm through the Ch. *bao-jia* system of local administration.³ Under this system, the district was divided into units called *bao*, for which the Xia family selected Ch. *baozhang* to conscript soldiers and collect taxes and levies. Zhizuo formed a single *bao*, and its *baozhang* appointed a Ch. *jiazhang* (until 1938, Ch. *luzhang*) to take responsibility for each small village (or each neighborhood, in the larger villages). The Xia family allowed

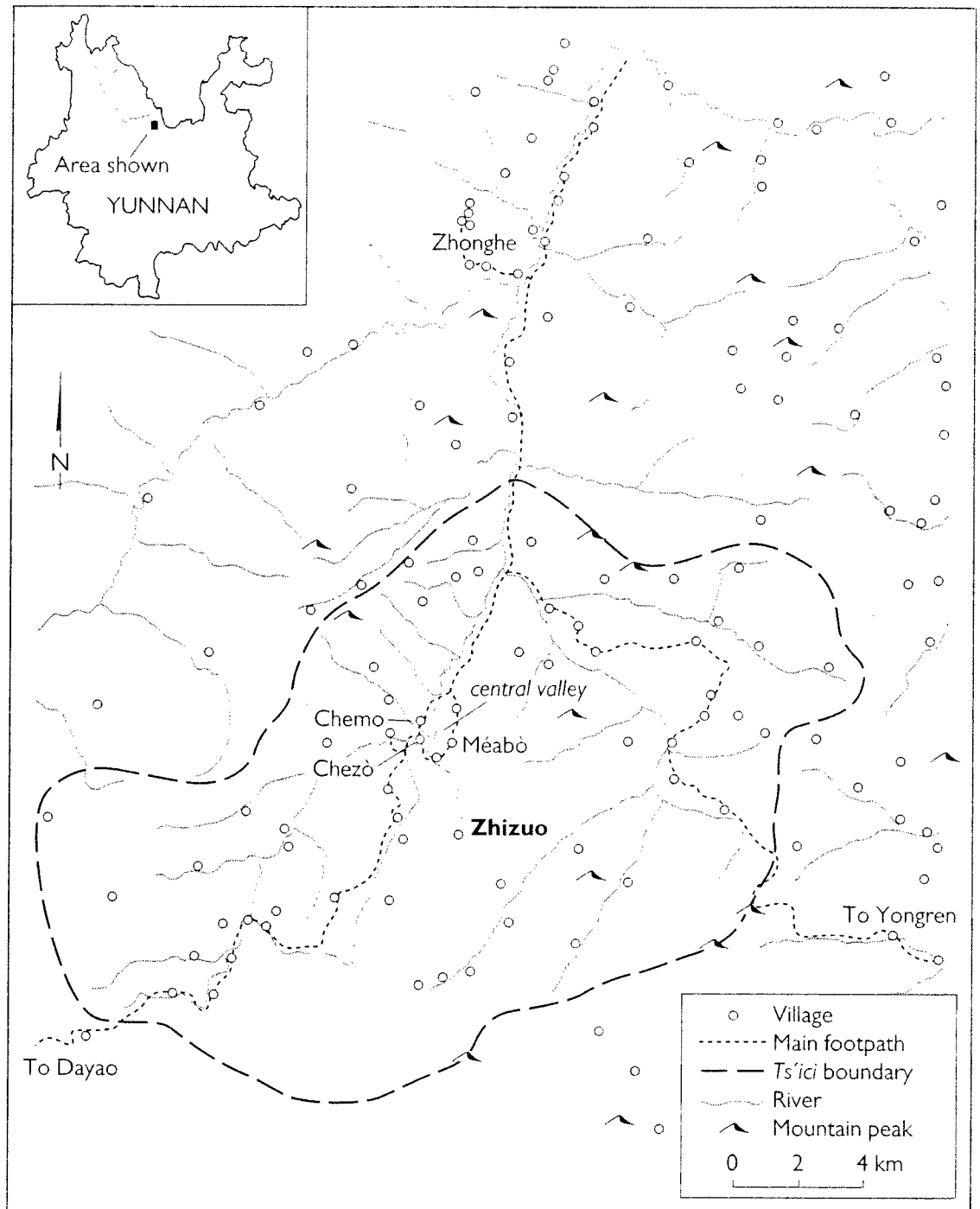


Figure 4.1 The Zhizuo *ts'ici* and surrounding area.

baozhang to retain about 2 Ch. *dan* of the tax grain they collected as a yearly salary, while *jiazhang* drew pittance of about .26 *dan* a year for their thankless task of convincing their fellow villagers to pay their taxes (YSB 1986, 109). In the 1940s, the power of the Xia family in Zhizuo was rivaled by that of the *bao*'s militia commander, Luo Guotian, who sold guns to men in Zhizuo and organized them into a formidable fighting force. Tensions with Luo Guotian, the pressing need to keep an eye on revenue collection, and Zhizuo's convenience as a rest stop on the road to the county capital frequently brought members of the Xia family to Zhizuo, with retinues of guards, servants, and runners.

Each year, Zhizuo residents selected a *ts'ici* household from among the community's most affluent families. The title of *ts'ici* rotated around the oval of villages in Zhizuo's central valley "toward the right hand" (counterclockwise), falling each year on a household in a different village. The most expensive and time-consuming obligation incurred by this household was to lodge, feed, and entertain the stream of soldiers, officials, police, merchants, and other influential visitors who walked the stone path through the valley. In addition, the host household and its staff of five maintained a prison cell for locals who were arrested for crimes or who were being held to await forcible conscription. The *ts'ici* carried letters from the district center to the next group of villages on the route to the county seat, maintained the stone footpath that made this route easier to travel, and buried all outsiders who died within Zhizuo and had no nearby kin. They managed a common fund, loaning it out each year to a family who, in lieu of interest, built a giant swing used in New Year's celebrations. Finally, the host household and its staff organized a yearly cycle of communal rituals intended to draw fertility, wealth, and good health into Zhizuo and drive away poverty and disease.

Unlike *baozhang* and militia commanders, host households in the *ts'ici* system were not appointed by the Xia family; they were elected by the community's most influential men. Foremost among these were the *baozhang* and, in the 1940s, the militia commander Luo Guotian. Representatives from the other relatively wealthy families of the area, *jiazhang* from each of the villages, and former *ts'ici* also participated. Two of Zhizuo's most affluent families had long identified themselves as Han. Despite their wide influence in the community, they were explicitly excluded from these meetings, which were open only to Lòlop'ò. This restriction applied also to the Xia family, who were Han and outsiders. The group of men met yearly on the lunar New Year day, as much of Zhizuo's population gathered in the courtyard of the previous year's

host household to celebrate the transfer of the title of *ts'ici*. The outgoing *ts'ici* ushered these most important of his guests—between twenty and thirty in number—into the barn loft of his house. Cleared of hay and furnished with two low beds and a fire pit, this room was the cell kept to hold those arrested by agents of the local state. The *baozhang* and the militia commander took seats at the upper ends of the beds, and the others crowded in next to them. Those who did not wish to assert a claim of status or participate in the discussion squatted on the floor at the foot of the beds or near the door. The guests were served a meal of rice, meat, and alcohol, with service proceeding from the beds' heads to the door. They then reviewed the names of two households chosen the year before to serve as hosts for the next two years and added a third name to the list.

Because the title was to rotate around the valley “toward the right hand,” households of only one village were considered for each year. Zhizuo residents insisted that the *ts'ici* household should have been free of deaths for the year previous to its service (except for miscarriages and deaths of infants without teeth). If the household scheduled for the following year had experienced a death, another choice was made. Households with widows or widowers of any generation were unacceptable. Most important, the household had to have a healthy, resident elderly couple who could take on the ritual duties of the *ts'ici*. This couple must have raised several children to adulthood and must have preserved the habit of wearing old-style Lòlop'ò clothing: hempen sandals rather than the more common straw ones, hempen shirts and trousers, and robes that buttoned down the side instead of the front. Finally, and crucially, the household had to be wealthy enough to bear the financial burdens of the *ts'ici*.

The formula “give it to those who can bear it [on their backs] or carry it [in their hands]” (*bù dù vé dù kǎ su t'è gǎ*) was supposed to guide the selection of the *ts'ici*. Every year, the host household drew an income of about 30 *dan* of grain from a 10-*mu* parcel of land that rotated with the *ts'ici*, but it often expended as much as 60 *dan* of grain and forty to fifty goats. The hundreds of soldiers and officials who traveled through the valley could plunge the host household into serious debt. For this reason, prospective *ts'ici* were said to be desperate to evade the responsibility. A staff member from the outgoing *ts'ici*—the *lòr₂*, chosen for his ability to speak and entertain—attended the meeting to persuade candidates to accept the position. Face to face with the most powerful members of the community, most of those selected found themselves accepting. Yet after the meeting, they would often seek a patron among the meeting's

most influential members; the militia commander Luo Guotian and a certain former *baozhang* were said to have been favorites. Borrowing from kin and calling in their debts, the newly selected would offer the patron a massive bribe of money and livestock, following this up with a chicken or young goat every month for a year. If the bribes were sufficient, the patron would speak for the family at the next year's meeting, claiming that its situation had changed and that it could no longer bear the burden. A daughter of a former *ts'ici* commented that having one's name mentioned at the meeting might easily mean ruin, either from the expenses of the *ts'ici* or from the bribes paid to avoid it.

Though few willingly took on the burden of the *ts'ici*, this service compensated a household's members with prestige they could obtain in no other way. Selection was public affirmation that a household had attained the most enviable of states. Relations between its eldest husband and wife were harmonious and fruitful, attended by neither deaths nor quarrels; they had produced several sons and daughters, and their fertility had blossomed into wealth. A passage from a mortuary lament, in which a daughter sings of happy times before her parents' deaths, describes this ideal state of fortune:

4.1

like rings on a buffalo's horns	wú nì k'ə pé zò
our fields widened	kà dù mi pé wo
our pastures expanded	ló dù mi pé wo
every kind of livestock grazed for us	jí lu jè ja ga
every kind of grain grew for us	kà lu tso ja ga
our sons raised a sea of wealth	zò ho né yi t'ù jə ga
our daughters filled the granary	né ho lò je kə jə ga
our bowls overflowed with grain	tsò mi s' zò jə d̥u lə
our cups filled up with broth	də mi ló zò jə d̥u lə

Those who selected such a household expected that, if it fulfilled its ritual obligations correctly, its harmonious productivity would spread throughout Zhizuo. Having served as *ts'ici* also made one a lifelong member of the inner circle that controlled the *ts'ici* system and, many insisted, ensured a couple a long and healthy life.

In some ways, Zhizuo's *ts'ici* system bears comparison to Mesoamerican cargo systems. Eric Wolf once suggested that service in such systems tended to impede the mobilization of wealth as capital within a community in comparison to capital mobilization in the outside world (1955, 458). This suggestion stimulated a debate about whether cargo

service tended to level a community economically by creating an incentive for the most prosperous to expend their wealth within the community or to stratify it socially by creating avenues for the rich to accumulate social prestige.⁴ While Zhizuo residents' reminiscences are not sufficiently detailed to decide whether the *ts'ici* system impeded the mobilization of wealth as capital, they do allow for some informed speculation.

Of the four Zhizuo households classified as landlords during the land reform movement, one was Han and thus had been excluded from service, and another was in a hamlet far from the oval of large villages from which *ts'ici* were chosen. In the mid-1940s, the Han family opened a hostel in Zhizuo for travelers with mule trains. With its profits, the family purchased land to farm with hired labor and mules to haul salt, sugar, and opium, expanding its fortunes considerably. The two Lòlop'ò landlord households whose location made them eligible for *ts'ici* service were those of the militia commander Luo Guotian and a former *baozhang* whom Zhizuo residents considered to be "gentry" (Ch. *shenshi*). These were the only households powerful enough to forestall their own selection as hosts in the *ts'ici* system, thereby avoiding the enormous drain on their resources that service would have entailed, and to receive flows of bribes from other families wishing to evade service. By the end of the 1940s, both of these households were heavily engaged in the salt, sugar, and opium trades, while most Zhizuo residents benefited from these trades only by hiring out as porters or muleteers. One might speculate that the *ts'ici* system helped free a few of the politically and militarily most influential to make use of Zhizuo's location along a trading route, even as it limited the capacity of many prosperous community members to mobilize their wealth for trade.

A Productive Embrace

The titles of *ts'ici* and *ts'icimo* (*ts'ici*'s wife) were granted to the household's eldest married couple. A staff of aides and other household members shielded this pair from the mundane duties of hosting visitors, carrying baggage and letters, guarding prisoners, and burying unclaimed corpses. The husband and wife were expected to live a life of quiet seclusion in the service of a group of ancestral spirits, the souls of

a mythological family believed to have founded Zhizuo. This family was said to have been not Lòlop`ò but Líp`ò—Central dialect speakers who lived in the adjacent mountains. Each account of the *ts'ici* system included a tale about how these ancestors, a father and his sons, traveled every year from their home in the villages of Vèlí and Laba higher in the Baicaolin Mountains to Zhizuo's wide, pleasant valley in search of wild pigs. At the center of the valley was a marsh, where they drove the pigs into the mud to be clubbed to death. On one occasion, as Li Yong told this story, the father looked around him and liked what he saw:

At that time, the forest was very thick, and water gushed and spurted from the spring down there. One of them dropped his knife sheath to drink water, and two rice grains rolled out. He shook more seeds out of the sheath. "Can one plow and plant in this place? It looks like a fine place to live. If this is a good place to plow and plant, let the heads of these rice plants grow as long as horses' tails; let the rats not eat them or the insects climb them; let them be truly excellent." After saying this, he sowed the seeds in three places.

Father and sons then went home. They returned nine months later to see (*ba*) the rice growing tall and thick, untouched by rats, birds, or insects. Understanding that this was indeed a fine place to live, they brought their families (*chi*, literally "houses") to settle. Initially, Li Yong said, all the obligations of the *ts'ici* fell on a single house in the center of Chemo called Ts'icizò, "little *ts'ici*." After several generations, as the numbers of visitors to the valley increased, this family found its burdens too heavy, and it created an ancestral trust of a large parcel of the valley's best land to rotate from village to village with the obligations of the *ts'ici*.

Upon their deaths, the father from Vèlí and Laba and his wife were united in two locations, one mobile, another fixed in the living landscape. The mobile site was a wooden reliquary box, passed with the title of *ts'ici* from one household to another. This box was rectangular, a little larger than a shoe box, with a protruding, scalloped rim on its lid (see Figure 4.2). It held, according to different accounts, two, six, or twelve ox, tiger, or human bones; a few seeds of buckwheat; six or twelve copper coins; and the legal title to the 10-*mu* ancestral trust that supplied the *ts'ici* household with its income. The box was shaped like the earth of Lòlop`ò mythology: a rectangular valley, surrounded by mountains (the lid's scalloped rim), beneath which were seeds, buried wealth, and the bones of ancestors.

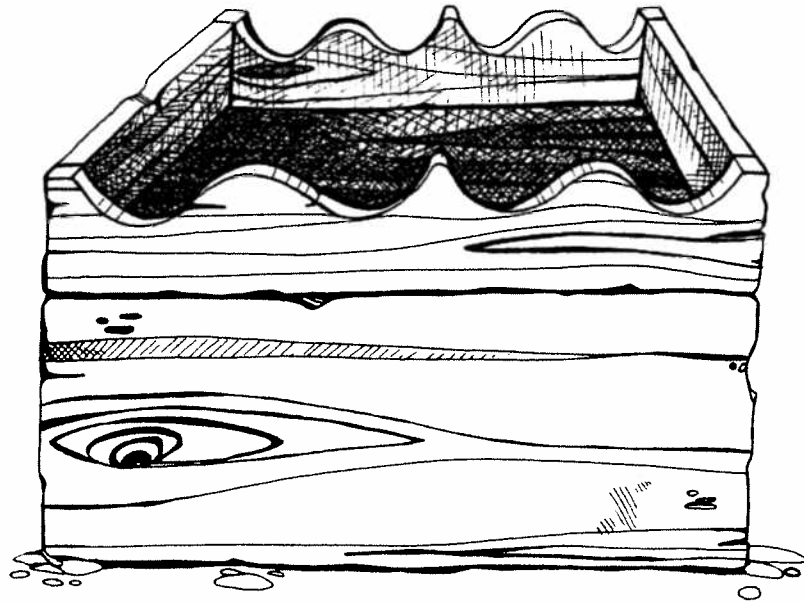


Figure 4.2 The reliquary box, shaped like the earth of Lòlop'ò mythology, which was passed with the title of *ts'ici* from one household to another each year.

The fixed resting place of the father and his wife was on a hilltop behind Chemo. Even in the 1990s, many mountain villages in Líp'ò and Lòlop'ò areas had preserved a patch of old-growth forest on a mountain slope behind and above the houses (CYZZ 1993, 137). One large, old tree was a Misi, said to govern the earth, weather, crops, animals, and all other living things in the area around the village. Others were sometimes Mijù (or Mitsr), the spirit of “earth veins,” which governed weather; Shòmògù (or Amùt'anè), a lightning spirit; and Lebùnè, a hunting spirit. Properly called Agàmisimo, “great earth spirit behind the house,” Zhizuo's Misi embodied the souls of the founding ancestral couple. It inhabited a giant pine tree on the peak of a hill several hundred yards higher than Chemo's highest house but much lower than the surrounding mountains. This tree was separated from the dense forest around it by a low stone wall. From the top of this hill, Agàmisimo could survey the entire central valley of Zhizuo, although its influence was said to extend much further, to all the villages and hamlets of the *ts'ici*.

The souls of this founding couple's children inhabited other places in the valley. Ritualists disagreed as to the sex of these children; some claimed, for instance, that the eldest was female, others that it was male. As spirits, however, all were double gendered, a spousal pair, bound to-

gether in permanent conjugal union, like an ancestral effigy. The eldest child and his or her spouse (Lòhə) occupied a small round stone beside the ancestral trust fields. This spirit was propitiated yearly, when rice seedlings were transplanted into the ancestral trust land. Another couple (Ləmælòhə, or “Lòhə at the river’s tail”) resided in a small stone shaped “like a little person,” or fetus, curled up inside a close, stone shelter just below and outside the valley. The *ts’ici* sponsored propitiations for this spirit whenever drought threatened the rice. A third (Cha) rested on a small wooden shelf within the doorway of a private house in Chemo and was propitiated yearly in the spring to counter the threat of epidemic disease. A fourth (Mijù) occupied a giant pine on a hilltop across the valley from Agàmisimo’s tree and regulated the weather, especially on the valley’s drought-prone eastern side. A fifth, no longer propitiated in the 1930s and 1940s, rested in another stone on the valley floor.

These spirits remained a lively conversational topic in the early 1990s. “Here’s what some people say about Agàmisimo,” Qi Degui once remarked. He and I were sitting outside the school gate, looking out toward Agàmisimo’s hill and the village of Chemo before it, where the ever-diligent Li Zhidong was planting walnut trees. “He has a head, up there near the top of the hill, a stomach in the center of Chemo, and arms, legs, and feet down by the river. Families on the head, like the Pu family, produce lots of college students. Those who live on his stomach never go hungry. And people who live on his feet, like Li Zhidong, are always running about busy, wishing they were on the stomach or the head.” Poking fun at Li Zhidong’s industry, Qi Degui imagined Agàmisimo to be like the ox (or tiger) of Lòlop’ò mythology, distributed over the land at the creation of the world, his intestines becoming the rivers, his abdomen the seas, his hair the forests, his ribs the roads, his teeth the cliffs, his lice the goats, and his dandruff the sparrows.⁵ Agàmisimo’s body, sprawled out over the village of Chemo, could as well be said to cover all of Zhizuo, encompassing its spirit progeny like its own head, stomach, and feet.

Qi Haiyun, a man in his late twenties who was soon to become Zhizuo’s Party secretary, used a different set of idioms to describe the relationship between Agàmisimo and Mijù, one of Agàmisimo’s spirit progeny, who occupied a pine tree on the opposite hilltop:

Mijù is over there on the shady side because he is only a branch of Agàmisimo. Agàmisimo sits where the sun shines first because he is like the king of a country. He governs Mijù and all the rest, including the little spirits at the mountain passes who are like customs officials guarding

the doors; you have to have their permission to pass, or things go badly for you.

But why are they on opposite sides?

It's like in a house, where older and younger generations don't sit together. Spirits are like that, too; if they sat together, they would be equal. Agàmisimo takes the best seat. Analyzing it with modern thought, we could say that Agàmisimo is like a township [Ch. *xiang*] government, and Mijù is an administrative village government [Ch. *cungongsuo*] in the township. Or, better, it's as though Mijù is the land-management office [Ch. *tudi guanlisuo*] of the township government: the territory they govern is the same, but Mijù has more specific duties. He manages the rain and the insect infestations, while Agàmisimo governs everything.

A body divided among head, stomach, and feet; a country with customs officials at the borders; a household where the elder generation takes the upstream seats; a township government organized bureaucratically into departments—each metaphor evokes an entity with a definite boundary, internally differentiated into organs encompassed by and subordinate to the whole. From its anchorage on the hill above Chemo, Agàmisimo's presence saturated the territory of Zhizuo to its boundaries.

Because Lòlop'ò actively forget their forebears after three generations, destroying ancestral effigies and keeping no written or oral genealogies, Agàmisimo did not participate directly in any line of descent. This founding ancestor was available to all who inhabited the territory it embraced. Many Lòlop'ò did imagine themselves to be descendants of the group of Líp'ò immigrants from higher in the Baicaolin Mountains—though without citing any genealogical evidence. But many speculated about other, more distant, origins, including ancient forebears from Nanjing⁶ or more recent Han immigrants from Sichuan.⁷ Still, only a few families who had insisted on their Han identity for generations could not add to these speculations the assertion that Agàmisimo was their own ancestor. When finer distinctions were made, they were based on residence rather than on genealogy. Thus, a group of households along the line of sight from Agàmisimo's giant tree to the valley's center claimed a particularly intimate relationship with the founding ancestors. They marked this intimacy at funerals with unfinished coffins rather than the black lacquered coffins used by most, and some suffered unusually at the hands of the ghosts created by the destruction of the *ts'ici*.⁸ Despite such distinctions, however, no single family could assert exclusive rights to the inheritance bequeathed by these common founding ancestors: the titles, ancestral estate, and benefits of health and fertility associated with

the *ts'ici* system. Like a bed's-head spirit in a house, Agàmisimo was the sign of a domestic unity that included all inhabitants in its sprawled and differentiated embrace.⁹

Agàmisimo's pine shared its hilltop with a tree of equal height and girth. In 1912, the year after the fall of the Qing dynasty, Agàmisimo's tree was struck by lightning. This was interpreted as an omen of disaster, acutely confirmed in the chaotic decades to come, and a claim by the lightning spirit Shìrìmògù on Agàmisimo and its descendants. As in other parts of China, death rituals in Zhizuo depicted an underworld modeled on the bureaucratic state.¹⁰ Shìrìmògù was said to occupy the vastness of the empty sky, but it was also associated closely with the underworld bureaucracy. When, having consulted his written ledgers, the fearsome underworld king Yama (or Yàlòwú) determined that someone was to die, he ordered Shìrìmògù to send down his police, Cánìshunì, to manacle the soul and escort it to the underworld. Zhizuo residents described these minions with precision—they carried manacles and chains exactly like those used by the men employed by the *baozhang* to capture youths for the Guomindang armies and lead them away to war. Lòlop'ò performed a brief ritual immediately after a death to plead with Shìrìmògù's hired hands to depart to the sky with their single captured soul and leave the living be. After the lightning strike of 1912, Zhizuo residents gave the pine beside Agàmisimo's to Shìrìmògù and began to initiate all offerings to Agàmisimo and his spirit progeny with a sacrifice to this spirit. Shìrìmògù was a permanent feature of the cosmos, present since the formation of sky and earth. But its claim on Agàmisimo was historical, associated with the fall of the Qing and the chaotic increase in demand for human fodder to swell warlord armies. Shìrìmògù's giant pine fissured Agàmisimo's unity at its source with a sign of the calamitous death that higher, bureaucratic powers could so easily bring. Always eating first at Agàmisimo's feasts, this spirit was a reminder that no living community could persist without paying these powers their due.

Warden, Speaker, and Bearer

Ritual experts spoke of the elderly *ts'ici* and *ts'icimo* primarily as servants of these ancestral spirits: hosts to the reliquary box and sponsors of the cycle of rituals for Agàmisimo and its spirit progeny. The union of this couple was imagined to enfold all of Agàmisimo's descendants, like

the skin of that spirit's extended body or the walls of a parental household. Like the conjugal but asexual coupling of the founding ancestors, this union was a source of procreative force for all those it embraced. In service of this force, the *ts'ici* couple was expected to strictly avoid everything associated with their influential visitors from the lowlands. Instead of wearing cotton, they were to wear the hempen clothing thought to have been worn by the original ancestors. They had to eat and drink from wooden bowls and clay jugs rather than from factory-made ceramic bowls, and they could eat no meat of dogs, horses, cattle, or any animals that had died without being slaughtered, all of which were associated with lowland Han and considered filthy and insulting to ancestors. They could not drink anything but homemade wheat beer and were not allowed to smoke. They were to be restrained in speech, never referring to death, violence, or conflict; and they could speak no Chinese for their year of service. It was understood that, as an elderly couple, they would not sit or sleep on the same bed or have sex. The *ts'icimo* was required to be past menopause so that menstrual pollution would not compromise her ritual purity. And they were to be socially restrained, stepping outside their upstream room only rarely and letting their staff and other members of their household serve as intermediaries between themselves and their important guests.

Nevertheless, the household's influential visitors brought within its walls everything the *ts'ici* couple was constrained to avoid. A staff of kin and friends, selected by the *ts'ici* a few days after the lunar New Year (on the year's first day of the tiger), managed these threats. This staff had five positions: *bòja*, *k'ala*, *lòra*, *fumo*, and *fuzò*. In the recollections of ritual experts and members of former *ts'ici* households, the prescribed duties and ideal personal qualities of these staff members exploited ideas about speech, sociability, sexuality, and procreation to manage the margins of the host household and negotiate the boundaries of the *ts'ici* territory. This staff protected the center of ancestral procreative force in Zhizuo by expediting the smooth passage of potentially threatening outsiders through and away.

Those who described the *ts'ici* system to me compared the *bòja* to a prison warden. He helped the household with its least pleasant duties, which involved caring for prisoners arrested by the *tusi*'s guards or by police from the county town. In keeping with its role of host for troublesome guests, the *ts'ici* household kept, clothed, and fed all such prisoners until they were led out of the valley in chains. Prisoners were kept in a room in the barn loft, which was furnished with a pair of low beds,

a strong lock, an iron collar, and chains. Most prisoners spent only a few days in this cell, since all serious cases were tried at the residence of the Xia *tusi* or in the county seat. Minor cases such as livestock theft and disputes over field boundaries were handled in the *ts'ici*'s courtyard. In such cases, the offended party made a formal complaint to the *baozhang*, who forwarded a written report to the *tusi*, who then decided whether to order a hearing. To conduct a hearing, the *tusi* traveled to Zhizuo and summoned the *baozhang* and the militia commander. After eating a full meal at the host household's expense, the *tusi* sent the *bòjǎ* to bring in both parties to the dispute. These individuals knelt in the courtyard while the *tusi* and the militia commander sat on the elevated porch to question them and deliver judgment. Zhizuo residents claimed that the host household paid the fees associated with hearings, though additional fees were probably exacted from the accused parties. In contrast to most agents of justice, some in Zhizuo maintained, the warden and the *ts'ici* treated prisoners as guests, feeding them adequately and neither beating nor cursing them. In the last decade of the Republic, many prisoners were local youths arrested in order to be forcibly conscripted into the Guomindang armies, and most of these young men would have had ties of kinship with both the warden and the host household.

Zhizuo residents recalled that the *ts'ici*'s cell was put to its final use in May 1949, after a battle with a "Communist bandit" named Ding Zhiping. According to official histories, Ding was a Communist Party member and a staff officer in the People's Liberation Army, serving in the Eighth Route Army. Six years previously, he had returned to his hometown in nearby Huaping County to begin underground work. By 1949, he had gathered an army of several hundred, which he called the People's Liberation Army, Western Yunnan Column. In March, he attacked the Huaping County town and then marched on Yongren. There, the numbers in Ding's column grew to more than ten thousand, as the Yongren militia and troops of sympathetic local military commanders from Sichuan and northern Yunnan joined it. From Yongren, the column divided to attack the northern Yunnan towns of Yuanmo and Dayao (CYZZ 1993, 190). Reports of the battle at Dayao that drifted to Zhizuo described it as a terrifying cataclysm, in which tens of thousands of Guomindang soldiers, accompanied by tanks and cannon, defeated Ding's army. Telling this story, Li Yong quoted a brief passage from a chant used to exorcise the ghosts of those who had died violently. The words of this passage refer to Ding's battle for Dayao, he said. (The first stanza of this fragment is in Chinese.)

4.2

Outside the north gate of Dayao town	Dayao xian bei men wai
outside the south gate	nan men wai
outside the east gate	dong men wai
outside the west gate	xi men wai
every day they shoot each other	pi ni pa le la ro
every day they stab each other	pi ni ci le jo ro
go to where your stabbed friends are	ni ci che jo du yi
go to where your slashed companions are	ni ci pe jo du yi
your best-loved friends are there	ni che che no ka jo
your best-loved companions are there	ni che pe no ka jo
every day they stab each other	pi ni ci le jo
every day they knife each other	pi ni da le jo
every day they die from gunshot wounds	pi ni pa le sr jo ro

More terrifying still, Ding's forces fled Dayao back toward Yongren on the mountain road that passed through Zhizuo. Ding and more than a hundred troops holed up in the massive new house of the militia commander Luo Guotian, threatening to burn it down if attacked. Unable to stomach the idea of his new house in ashes, Luo offered Ding peaceful passage out of Zhizuo. After the "Communist bandits" filed out his front door, Luo and his Zhizuo militia attacked them, killing more than twenty and sparing none of the wounded. For the next few months, Guomindang troops hunted those who had escaped through the surrounding hills, locking them up in the host household's prison cell until they could be taken to Dayao for punishment.

Stories of this battle were also the occasion for recollections of the host household's most onerous of duties, burying outsiders who died within Zhizuo's boundaries and who had no kin to care for their corpses. Ordinarily, such burials were the *bòjā*'s responsibility. Yet people in Zhizuo strongly believed that to handle the corpses of those who had died of violence was to incur the grave danger of violence or affliction descending on one's own head. After the battle with Ding Zhiping, the *bòjā* and the other staff members who ordinarily shielded the *ts'ici* from contact with outside, polluting influences hid in their homes while more than twenty corpses lay rotting in the sun. Finally, the *ts'ici* and his son dragged them one by one into a gully and buried them. For forty years after this incident, people passing this mass grave reported spotting the ghosts of Ding Zhiping's defeated army wandering headless about the rocks, with bullet holes in their bodies or bayonets through their chests.

Another member of the *ts'ici* staff, the *lòrɿ*, or speaker, was expected to help the household with its formidable task of feeding and entertaining important visitors. Former members of host families spoke of enormous trouble and expense. "These days, officials come in groups of two or three, stay a day, and leave," recalled a woman who had been twelve when her household was *ts'ici*, "but back then, they came in groups of twenty or thirty. They came in litters with bearers and someone out front to wave the flies away." These processions of soldiers, officials, clerks, and runners would sometimes stay for days, demanding meat, bean curd, and alcohol at every meal. The worst years in living memory were 1935 and 1949, when soldiers from both the People's Liberation Army and the Guomindang armies visited Zhizuo in quick succession. Residents of the large village of Chemo recalled that in the summer of 1949 four hundred soldiers of the Guomindang's Twenty-Sixth Division lodged in the host household's courtyard for a month, hunting down the remnants of Ding Zhiping's troop of Communists and eating meat every day. Later that year, soldiers of the People's Liberation Army stayed with the same host household for several weeks. This family, among Chemo's most affluent, was financially ruined just in time to be classed as lower-middle peasants during the land reform movement and to enjoy the relative safety from persecution this status afforded for the next thirty years.

These powerful outsiders rarely showed the civility that hosts could expect from local guests. Another child of a former *ts'ici* remembered that on one of his frequent trips through Zhizuo the Xia *tusi*, dissatisfied with the quality of his dinner, beat the *ts'ici* with a board. Other officials also beat *ts'ici*, cursed them, or threw things at them. The speaker's job was to employ skills of wit and conversation to prevent such incidents. During his year of service, he lived in the host household, at its expense, with the sole duty of eating, drinking, and chatting with the guests. The ideal speaker needed to be a gregarious personality, a good drinker, and an accomplished conversationalist. He had to be fluent in Chinese, dress fashionably, and possess cosmopolitan manners that would not draw the scorn of sophisticated guests. The speaker was required to greet the guests as they entered the valley, lead them to the host household, seat them, and call for food and drink, allowing the *ts'ici* and *ts'icimo* to make only a brief, welcoming appearance before retiring again.

Another aide was the *k'ɿɿ*, or bearer, whose main responsibility was to carry the luggage of visiting officials as they left the valley. Since most officials traveled with more belongings than one man could carry, the

bearer often pressed his kin or that of the *ts'ici* to help. He and his crew accompanied officials twenty-five kilometers south to the next group of villages with a *huotou* system on the way to the county capital,¹¹ or twenty kilometers north to the district seat, residence of the Xia *tusi*. Once on the road, officials sometimes pressed the bearer and his company into service for the journey to the county capital or even beyond. The bearer also saw to it that letters arriving in Zhizuo were carried onward south to the next group of villages or north to the district seat. Because the bearer himself was so busy, this task frequently fell to the younger members of the *ts'ici*'s own household. Li Yong recalled that during his father's year of service in 1929, he delivered letters after school. He was only nine years old and shoeless, but when a letter came, he packed it in his school bag and carried it more than twenty kilometers, returning in the dark. The bearer also had a ritual obligation: at the New Year, he carried the reliquary box from one host household to the next. This duty required of the bearer a ritual purity similar to that of the elderly *ts'ici* couple. Li Yong insisted that the best candidate for bearer was unmarried; he could wear only clothing associated with the original Líp'ò ancestors; and he had to be an "honest" man, who spoke seldom and displayed little agility of wit. Qi Bao'en put it more bluntly. The ideal bearer, he said, was an idiot (*bomi*) who spoke slowly, if at all, and was naive about sexual relations.

In addition to warden, speaker, and bearer, the staff of the *ts'ici* included two assistants, *fumo* and *fuzò* (combining the Chinese word *fu*, "deputy" or "assistant," with the Lòlongo suffixes *mo* and *zò*, "big" and "small"). Several villages in Zhizuo selected responsible men to greet and host important people passing through from other villages or regions. Those selected in the host household's village became general assistants to that household and helped organize and prepare food for rituals. At most, they expended several days of labor and two chickens, and their only compensation was the prestige of their jobs.

The Price of Horse Feed

The rules and procedures recounted by ritual experts and former members of *ts'ici* households gave warden, speaker, and bearer the right to collect recompense for their duties. In exercising this right, they extended the personal qualities associated with their practical re-

As a tax on the fertility of horses, the “price of horse feed” was appropriate remuneration for the warden, whose duties became increasingly associated with compulsory military service in the Guomindang armies. A military conscription law was instituted in 1933. Initially, it stipulated that only sons would not be drafted; in a family with two to three sons, one would be drafted; in a family with three to five, two would be drafted. But as the Guomindang struggled to prosecute the war against the Japanese, military conscription in rural Yunnan expanded dramatically in scope and intensity. Conscription quotas for the nearby county of Yaoan, for instance, increased from 120 men in 1935 to 800 in 1942.¹³ During the civil war, the military conscription law was revised to stipulate that one son would be drafted from a family with two sons, two from a family with three sons, and three from a family with five sons (CYZZ 1994, 298). The words from Li Yong’s chant, “from one family, take two *sheng*, from three families, take six *sheng*; take no more, take no less,” seem to mimic this harsher injunction, which Zhizuo residents chanted thus:

4.4

of two sons, harvest one	nì zò chī zò sho
of three sons, harvest two	sa zò nì zò sho
of five sons, harvest three	ngó zò sa zò sho

Youths were drafted from their villages in October and November of each year, so their official term of service could begin in January. Each autumn of the Republic’s last decade, Zhizuo’s *baozhang* employed two local men to capture conscripts. Carrying guns, iron neck bands, and chains, they apprehended youths, chained their necks, and led them to the prison cell of the *ts’ici*, where it was the warden’s responsibility to guard them. These two men were roundly despised by their neighbors, who called them “dogs’ legs” (*ánò chī*) and sometimes spat on them when passing on the paths. When these police were spotted near their villages, youths from poor households fled or went into hiding. Some ate a wild fruit that produced a permanent goiter or amputated two joints of their trigger finger. Wealthier families paid the *baozhang* a bribe when their sons reached the age of sixteen and followed this up with more bribes each autumn. After being gathered in the *ts’ici*’s house, recruits were chained together and led from the valley at gunpoint. War and the execrable conditions suffered by ordinary soldiers in the Guomindang armies ensured that few returned. The warden’s chanted words “from the sky’s creation, from the earth’s origin, fathers and sons

have bred horses together, thirty generations of fathers, thirty generations of sons and grandsons” clearly associate a line of agnates with the procreative potential of brood mares. The warden taxed the fertility of horses just as the Guomindang taxed the fertility of fathers with forced conscription.

The warden’s price was governed by the same principle of reciprocity that organized the *ts’ici*’s duties as host. To associate the “price of horse feed” with his job of smoothing the way for the hated “dogs’ legs” was to acknowledge that higher powers would always demand tribute. In the case of forced conscription, this price was sons, on whom the future procreative potential of any family depended. While the burden of forced conscription could not be distributed equitably, the warden’s chanted insistence on taking only from those who had mares was an assertion that the analogous tax on the fertility of horses, at least, should be distributed among those who could bear it best.

The Speaker’s Price

The idiom of procreative potential also informed the rules for compensating the speaker and the bearer. A few hundred yards upstream of the ancestral trust fields, where a bend in the river on one side and terraces on the other formed a warm, protected corner, was another plot of land, of about 1 *mu*. This was the seed bed in which rice to be transplanted into the larger fields grew for its first fifty days. Like the ancestral trust fields, it rotated with the *ts’ici*, and it was farmed communally by workers organized by the host household. It was called the *lör̄mi*, the “speaker’s field.” A tenth of the rice seedlings grown in this field were transplanted back into it, and the speaker received their harvest.

In many contexts, Zhizuo residents compared growing rice to raising children. Sowing rice was likened to insemination; uprooting and transplanting seedlings to giving birth; hoeing, weeding, and fertilizing the growing plants to feeding and clothing children; harvesting rice plants to the labor of helping people die; and storing rice seeds to keeping ancestral souls in preparation for their rebirth.¹⁴ Men from the households of the *ts’ici* and their brothers lavished attention on the womblike speaker’s field, fertilizing it with ashes from nitrogen-fixing tree species and several applications of manure and soaking, plowing, and harrowing it repeatedly until the earth blended into a thick, nutritious mud.

After smoothing the bed with a wooden dressing bar, the *ts'ici* himself chose a time when no women were nearby to hang a bag of seed on his belt and scatter it over this warm, sheltered earth. Fifty days later, female kin and friends of the *ts'icimo* pulled up the seedlings and transplanted them into the larger fields, replanting about a tenth into the *lòrəmi*, on a festive occasion in which this work was explicitly associated with giving birth (described in chapter 5).

One afternoon, as he was talking about the speaker's compensation to a group of men gathered in my room, Li Yong abruptly switched topics. In Zhenamo, nearby, he said, people do not replant any rice seedlings back into their seed beds after pulling them up. Instead, they spend the entire year intermittently tilling and fertilizing their seed beds to prepare them for the next year's seeds: "Every time a *Máchìp'ò* [a derogatory term for Zhenamo residents] has spare time, he is out tilling his seed bed. They are very stubborn people. That's what *Máchìp'ò* means, stupid, stubborn people. They never learn anything new; they always sow the same fields their ancestors sowed. Even now the Party can't convince some to transplant back into their seed beds. They say the seed bed is the mother and the seedling the son, and to replant the seedling in the seed bed would be like the son fucking the mother."

Those listening laughed as though he had told an off-color joke. People in Zhizuo do transplant seedlings back into their seed beds. Not to do so in a place where every inch of irrigable land is precious would make one as stupid as a *Máchìp'ò*. I never heard anyone explicitly deny that "the seed bed is the mother, the seedling the son," but saying it out loud disturbed the neat homology Zhizuo residents habitually make between procreation and rice production. As he told how Zhenamo residents extend the logic of procreative metaphor one step further than *Lòlop'ò* usually care to, Li Yong's implication was clear: by accepting the harvest from seedlings transplanted back into the seed bed as his due, the speaker consumed the issue of a son's sexual relations with his mother.

The Price of Grass

If someone had to eat this scandalous by-product, the speaker was an appropriate choice. I came to understand this as those who had been members of *ts'ici* households repeatedly contrasted the offices of speaker and bearer. The speaker had a famous time eating,

drinking, and chatting, while the bearer's job was a heavy burden. The speaker needed to be a sophisticate, while the bearer was preferably an idiot. The speaker wore stylish "Han" clothing that buttoned down the front, while the bearer dressed in old-style hempen clothes that buttoned down the side. And the speaker accepted every opportunity for social intercourse, while the bearer rarely spoke and was ideally celibate. In these recollections, the opposite orientations of speaker and bearer toward eating, speaking, sexual activity, and signs of Lòlop'ò ancestry were of a piece with their opposite relations to the boundaries of the Zhizuo *ts'ici*.

In collecting his compensation, the bearer was a boundary maker. His recompense for his year of service was called "the price of grass" (*cí p'ù sho*). At the end of the year, he undertook a tour of the small high-mountain settlements on the *ts'ici*'s borders, collecting money or grain from those living outside who grazed their goats and cattle on land within. There was no common understanding of how much this fee should be, and what the bearer collected depended on his own industry and the thickness of his skin. The chant quoted earlier in fragment 4.3 also mentions the bearer's tour and names some of the boundary villages from which he bore back his compensation. Chanted in the bearer's voice, it evokes his ideally childlike character.

4.5

Where do I receive the price of grass?	<i>cí p'ù à lí sho</i>
I bear it back from Lík'ò	<i>Lík'ò bù k'ò ga sho kò ló</i>
back from Yík'ùti	<i>Yík'ùti k'ò ga</i>
the valley's head and tail	<i>jò wú jò mæ</i>
Tàbægòmo and Jjòmo	<i>Tàbægòmo Jjòmo</i>
I receive and all goes well	<i>sho tsæ go tsæ ga</i>
I feed my entire family	<i>bo ló ngo chì jò</i>
my grandchildren laugh	<i>ngo lí gə sə ga</i>

In negotiating which hamlets should pay for the right to graze their animals on what land, the bearer established the territorial boundaries of the *ts'ici*. As he hauled visitors' baggage out of the valley and carried letters through it, he worked to preserve these boundaries by facilitating the movement of outsiders through and away. His hempen clothing, monolingual speech, and presumed celibacy reproduced in his person this boundary-making status. His clothing signaled his intimate connection with the original Lòlop'ò ancestors, his laconic speech and celibacy that he eschewed an excess of social relations with people other than close kin.

The ideal speaker, in contrast, specialized in boundary traversals. His job of cultivating and enlivening relations with powerful outsiders was centrifugally oriented. His Han clothing, multilingual facility, conversational skills, and indulgence in food and alcohol all directed his person toward promiscuous and facile sociability, especially with outsiders. His task was to take on the qualities of those who most directly threatened the community in order to deflect part of that threat. Indiscriminate in his social relations, the speaker may have been thought indiscriminate sexually as well: his personal qualities precisely fit the stereotype of a successful adulterer in Zhizuo. And in Zhizuo, as in many places, the forbidden indiscriminate par excellence was incest between mother and son. The speaker too reproduced his boundary-traversing status in his person. To pay him with the issue of an unavoidable sexual relation between mother and son was to recognize the social promiscuity with which he helped preserve Zhizuo's boundaries by continuously transgressing them.

Recollections of the speaker's transgressive character illuminate the proscriptions applied to the *ts'ici* couple. At the house's center, in the upstream room, this couple combined all the most powerful signs of Lòlop'ò ancestry with restricted speech, sociability, and sexuality as well as abstention from everything associated with Han outsiders. At the house's margins, in the courtyard, porch, and outer rooms, the speaker stoked the fires of hospitality with everything the *ts'ici* and *ts'icimo* were enjoined to avoid—a specialist in scandalous unrestraint managing the unrestrained speech, sociability, and sexuality that transgressed the house's walls from without. As designated hosts for the entire territory of Zhizuo, the *ts'ici* couple made it possible to imagine this territory similarly as a household, sheltering both a powerful productive union and potentially troublesome guests, who must be fed, flattered, and hurried on their way.

Zhizuo residents' insistence on the bearer's contrasting character participated in this imaginative constitution of a houselike territory in a different way. The proscriptions that were applied to the bearer's diet, speech, clothing, and sexuality were identical to (if not as strict as) those applied to the *ts'ici* and *ts'icimo*, because of his association with the reliquary box they served. In their relation to this box, the *ts'ici* couple acted as a conduit through which the procreative power of the ancestral union it represented descended on the valley-house of Zhizuo. In *his* relation to the reliquary, the bearer made this union move, passing it like a bride from one village and one household to the next, treating it as the sister

and wife that bound each Zhizuo household to others. In this way, Zhizuo residents could imagine bearer and *ts'ici* couple to combine in their persons the principles of descent and affinity on which all relations of kinship were built, extending these principles to saturate the house of Zhizuo to its outer boundaries. As they recollected the rules and procedures of the *ts'ici* system, people used these ideas about the fluidity and fixity of speech, sexuality, and sociability to imagine Zhizuo as, at once, a household descended from a single set of ancestors and a circle of households connected through marriage alliances.

Conclusion

The ethnographers who in 1953 bravely set out to classify the inhabitants of thousands of mountain villages like Yijichang and Zhizuo learned to be flexible in applying Stalin's four criteria for defining nationality—common territory, common language, common economic base, and common psychological makeup (Stalin 1956, 294–295)—tempering them with older associations with origin and inheritance that the term *minzu* (“nationality”) had gathered since its adoption into Chinese around 1900 (Dikötter 1992; Lin Y. 1963). To these ethnographers, Zhizuo residents clearly shared a territory, language, economy, and historical origin with the speakers of the Central dialect of Yi who surrounded them (if only more problematically with the far-flung groups also labeled “Yi” in other parts of the southwest). Even in the 1980s and early 1990s, county and prefectural officials frequently invoked these criteria to dismiss Zhizuo residents' claims to a separate *minzu* status as ignorant or delusional.

People in Zhizuo, however, took advantage of associations of *minzu* with origin, inheritance, and descent to link the problem of “nationality” to a large and systematic body of expert knowledge about the past. Their accounts of the *ts'ici* system used moral ideas about speech, sociability, and sexuality to craft an imagined unity for all those who claimed to be Lòlop'ò. Creating terms of comparison between agricultural cycles and life cycles, and the spatial arrangements of households and those of the territory of Zhizuo, these recollections compounded mutually contradictory ideas about descent and affinity into a single institutional container (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 185). Zhizuo was a single productive unity, a household descended from a single set of ancestors, or a series of households

bound together through marriage exchanges and mutually involved in the intimate processes of household reproduction. From within this imagined unity, Zhizuo residents could deal with powerful outsiders as a household would, flattering them with the honors and privileges of guests while excluding them from internal household affairs.

Ethnographers and administrators could easily pass off this self-consciously formal and reflexive talk about the past as innocuous nostalgia for a defunct “nationality custom.” But under the cover of its formality, it created a forceful strategy of self-representation, in which spatial descent and symbolic affinity took the place of the historical genealogies that preoccupied those who created and defended *minzu* classifications. Claims that the *ts’ici* is “the heart of our nationality” and “our nationality’s most important custom” employed the troubled political potency of the term *minzu* to give this self-representational strategy force in the present. Much has been written about how colonizing regimes create ethnicities for their subjects. Studies of ethnicity and nationality in China, especially, have repeatedly shown how local identities are forcefully produced or molded by state policies (Harrell 1990, 1995; Mackerras 1994; Gladney 1991, 1994). These accounts of the rules and procedures of a long dead but fondly remembered institution point to another side of this dialectic, in which older local self-representations engage or absorb state discourses about ethnicity to create new possibilities for struggle and self-definition.

CHAPTER NINE

A Shattered Gourd

“My wife and her friends are all mad [*tʰe*],” said Li Wuyi one evening. We sat by the fire eating rice in a thin broth of red beans. The moon in the courtyard was almost full. Li Wuyi’s wife and daughter had gone out to dance. His maternal uncle sat at the bed’s head with a bowl of grain alcohol, interrupting the conversation now and again to blow a note as he tuned the bamboo tubes of a gourd-pipe.

I already knew the story; I had heard it several times from others. Qi Ping, a grandmother in her early forties and a friend of Li Wuyi’s wife, had been arrested and released a few nights before for vandalizing the brigade government building. It had happened on the fifteenth of the first lunar month. Since 1987, the township government had sponsored a Clothing Competition Festival on this date. *Líp’ò* and *Lòlop’ò* from the surrounding region came to dance, and delegations of officials visited to take photographs, make speeches, and compile reports. Qi Ping had danced for hours that night to gourd-pipe music, her fingers intertwined with the fingers of women on either side, the glossy hair of her goatskin catching the light of a bonfire in circle’s center.

Near dawn, as the dancers drifted home, Qi Ping and a few friends walked the short path to the brigade government building. The gates were locked, but earlier that night youths had broken down the post on which one gate swung, leaving a gap between gate and wall. The building was empty. Most years, visiting officials slept in its guest rooms; this year, beds had been prepared for them in the school instead, and the school principal had quietly locked them into their rooms after dark. Qi Ping slipped inside.

Birth planning regulations had been lettered on a plastered wall of the porch: each couple was to be limited to two children; a third would be allowed if one of the first two could be certified physically or mentally handicapped; an interval of three to five years should follow each birth; marriage should be delayed until the age of twenty-four for women and twenty-six for men. Somewhere in one of the locked offices upstairs was a list of about three hundred names, written in ball-point pen on a stack of paper—the names of women targeted for sterilization in the birth planning campaign that had ended two weeks before. Someone, probably the youths who had broken the gate, had overturned the tables and thrown the pots and pans into the courtyard. Qi Ping danced around the courtyard, shouting and kicking a pot until her husband found her and hustled her home.

“It’s the madness of itchy feet [*chìle*],” said Li Wuyi. “Some women, my wife and her brother’s wife, for instance, have this strange affliction. On certain days in the spring, if they don’t dance, their legs itch fiercely, as if with a rash.” Throughout Li Wuyi’s lifetime, even during the worst years of the Cultural Revolution, people had gathered to dance in outdoor sites on the first and fifteenth nights of the first lunar month. On those nights, Li Wuyi said, you can hear couples arguing: “He’s tired; he wants to go home. She wants to stay and dance until dawn. ‘If I don’t dance, my feet will itch!’ ‘Dance on the road! Dance in the courtyard at home!’”

The morning after her dance, a policeman visiting from the township arrested Qi Ping and questioned her before the brigade cadres. What had she been thinking? The policeman was young, puzzled, and impatient. Qi Ping remained silent; the brigade chief explained that sometimes some women just go mad. It had happened before. During the Clothing Competition Festival of 1989, after dancing energetically all night, Qi Ping and Li Wuyi’s wife, Li Siping, had stormed the brigade government building. They had overturned the table and benches on the porch, burst into the kitchen, and thrown the pots and pans on the floor. Superstition was to blame, the brigade chief said. The women thought they were possessed by a ghost, and they went mad. The policeman had other things on his mind—identifying those who had done the real damage to the brigade government building, finding the person who had burned down the bridge at the valley’s tail, and investigating rumors of threats to the brigade Party secretary’s life. Qi Ping was released, and her husband was warned to keep her from dancing for a while.



This book has investigated transactions between intimate practices of the everyday and the imagined state and nation. My questions about these transactions have taken many forms. How did people in this mountainous corner of China draw on the intricacies of ritual to imagine state power and its effects? How did images of the state intersect circuits of debt and nurture between children and their parents, living or dead? How were such images refracted into the courtyards and upstream rooms of houses as guarantors of patriarchal authority, or as bearers of violence and pain? How did people manipulate memory, language, and ritual to deal with memories of past violence, to seek relief from their continued effects, and to apportion responsibility for their origins? How did practices of the everyday become resources with which to explore questions of community and justice? In response to these questions, a narrative of the relations between daily life and the distant image of the state has emerged from my informants' stories about the past. It is a critical narrative, full of irony, productive of subversive tactics and alternative visions. It describes a gradual movement of the imagined state from outside to inside, from alien to intimate. At the same time, it depicts a widening rift between the everyday and the imagined state and nation.

Stripped to a simple plot line, the narrative goes something like this. In the remembered *ts'ici* system of the 1940s, the state was an external Other, defining a houselike community within. A generative union at the core of this community combined the principles of affinity and descent that animated household relations. This union excluded the imagined state from community affairs, drawing its agents in only to send them on their way and managing the social and moral threats their incursions entailed. In the early 1950s, the new socialist state exhumed and reoccupied the intimately lived landscape, installing itself at the center of communal life as the generative origin of production and collective reproduction. By the end of the 1950s, images of the state as a generative force had become associated with the implacable avarice of the ghosts of those who had died during the famine. During the Cultural Revolution, the state, personified as the specter of Chairman Mao, possessed the bodies and speech of youthful activists and hapless cadres, as famine and chaos were traced to a double origin: to the distant, imagined centers of state and nation, on the one hand, and to the actions of kin and friends, on the other. As state power grew increasingly intimate, infusing the very bodies of children and friends, it became ever more elusive, more spectral, more difficult to grasp and comprehend. The advent of household cultivation in the 1980s accelerated this divergence. As households became the central focus

of the arts of governance, the redistributive power of the state moved out of the hands of basic-level cadres to both the market and a network of bureaucratic agencies. The state became faceless, unlikely to be found personified in the everyday, in human form.

Stating it thus makes it abundantly clear that this narrative is an artifice. It is the product of a collective effort, of my informants in dialogue with myself, to give past time a clear trajectory in relation to the concerns of the present. As such, however, it illuminates with precision the most pressing of these concerns, the unvoiced background for Li Wuyi's amused tale of Qi Ping's pot-kicking dance: the birth planning campaign that was under way at the time. Birth planning was the end point of this narrative, the culmination of the state's transformation from personified external Other to abstract internal Other.

Birth planning gave the state access to the most intimate of all realms. Surgeons' scalpels made this access material as they cut into female bodies to perform IUD insertions, tubal ligations, and abortions—the predominant contraceptive methods in rural areas. The objects of these surgical incisions, wombs (*dolomo*), were the most intimate places of all, and fundamental to every vision of social unity. In ritual, wombs expanded into a series of rectilinear shapes: granaries, door frames, reliquary boxes, upstream rooms, and square-cornered mountain valleys, where opposite and complementary principles like male and female, descent and affinity merged to form new social relations and beings. And for those who endured contraceptive surgeries, wombs were direct sources of physical strength and spiritual exuberance. As it directed the scalpels of birth planning surgeons, the state penetrated the social to its mythical origins and the corporeal to its material core.

Yet this state was more evasive of attempts to represent and comprehend it than ever before. It no longer possessed its agents; they no longer voiced personal commitment to its policies; they simply repeated them as emanating from higher sources. In justifying these policies, they no longer appealed to class struggle or even to personal enrichment but to the utterly abstract issues of the “quantity and quality of the population” (Ch. *renkou shuliang yu suzhi*). The rift between the effects of the state on the most intimate aspects of the everyday, on the one hand, and the possibilities for imagining it fully and vividly, on the other hand, was at its widest.

The tale of Qi Ping's pot-kicking dance explored this rift, its confusion, and its costs. Like so many other stories retold here, it emerged in dialogue among several men, some of them implicated in its every turn,

one whose lack of history or kin made him a convenient repository for stories of this kind. It was a tale about the afflictions of another—and between its words, as though through the weave of a bamboo sieve, the shadow of yet another could be glimpsed. The shape and attitude of this second Other were difficult to discern, yet they determined the meaning of the tale, the motivations of its players, the past it elaborated, the future it projected. As always, place was crucial. My interlocutors mentioned a few particulars: the lettered wall, the locked office above, the courtyard with its overturned tables and scattered pots, the circles of Qi Ping's dance. Through these details of place, one can discern the ambiguous shape of that baffling Other: written authority transmitted from an indeterminate source above.

As always, this Other can be envisioned only in relation to an object. That object, the target of the authoritative writing lettered on the walls and penned on stacks of paper, was no longer mainly production; it was a problematic, reproducing population. The principal material foundation for this authority was no longer productive fields; it was fertile wombs. These wombs were numbered and assessed in records and reports—more than three hundred of the most problematic were named in a list in the locked office above. Qi Ping's name was not on that list, but those of several of her friends waiting outside were, and her daughter lay in bed ill from the surgery. "She is mad," the brigade chief told the township policeman. "My wife and her friends are all mad," Li Wuyi said to me. Yet both dissembled, for both knew that there is no such thing as, simply, "madness": all madness has a specific origin that may be divined and named, and the route back to that origin is everything.

What was this origin? Qi Ping remained silent after her release, and my male informants reached no consensus. Li Wuyi's best guess was a revealing joke—the madness of "itchy feet." He attributed this malady to a group of women in early middle age, including his wife, who had played active parts in the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. *Le*, "to itch," is a euphemism for *t'a*, "to lust"; it denotes the unpredictable, chaotic, and even fearsome nature of feminine sexuality, with a material foundation in the womb. Cutting into wombs harmed individual bodies and penetrated the social institution of community to the quick, but it also released forces of chaos and exuberance associated with feminine reproductive potential.

Qi Ping's dance was among many acts of rebellion against a campaign of compulsory sterilization carried out in Zhizuo in the spring of 1993. Since the beginning of the one-child campaign in China in 1978, central

officials and cultural elites had effected a thorough redefinition of “minorities,” as troubled populations in need of eugenic reform. The one-child campaign had twin goals: improving the “quality” of the national population was as urgent as controlling its quantity. In the interest of older goals of “nationality unity,” most members of minority groups had been allowed more than one child in the past. In the more recent discourses about “population quality,” however, many minorities were repeatedly cited as exemplary of the low quality of China’s rural population. “Feudal” and “backward,” the minorities of the country’s western half were seen to be plagued by inbreeding that led to genetic inferiority. They were represented as beset by health problems, including high rates of mental illness and retardation. Their inferior maternal and infant health care was thought to produce children of low quality, with high rates of defects and deficient intelligence. In the early 1990s, these concerns led to efforts to tighten birth planning among minority populations in provinces throughout western China. Yunnan issued more restrictive regulations for its minorities in 1991, and, in the spring of 1993, Yongren County carried out an intensive sterilization campaign in its mountainous minority regions.

This final chapter tells the story of this birth planning campaign as a tale of the widening rift between the everyday and the imagined state. This campaign’s goal was to sterilize all women under the age of forty-two who had borne two or more healthy children. Although tubal ligation was accepted as relatively harmless in many parts of rural China, in Zhizuo it conflicted with deep-seated ideas about the flows of sexual energy through the body and the evil capacity of blockages or reversals in such flows to reverberate through the closely inhabited world. Women targeted for sterilization feared that it would obstruct the currents of sexual energy through their bodies. Thus, along with losing their capacity to renew their families in case of death, they would be robbed of the physical energy they needed to sustain their households, and they would lose their enthusiasm for sexual activity and their exuberance for life—all this for the goal of improving the “quality” of an abstract national population in which their own place was increasingly uncertain. The campaign had many victims. Among them were more than eighty young women compelled to undergo tubal ligation, who experienced fear, humiliation, and varying degrees of physical debilitation. Also among the victims was the young brigade Party secretary who brought the campaign to Zhizuo. Generally powerless, invested at this moment with a frightening power over his friends, parents, affines, and enemies, he

began the campaign with hopeful visions of personal advancement and ended it in isolation and despair. All of these victims were caught between harsh violations of their most intimate everyday worlds and the oppressive difficulty of imagining the ultimate agent of these violations.

Birth Planning in Zhizuo

Michel Foucault noted that the regulation of population in relation to economy is the “ultimate end” of the modern state (1991, 103). “It is the population itself,” Foucault wrote, “on which [modern] government will act directly or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the direction of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, etc. . . . The population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government” (1991, 100). Frank Dikötter (1995) has shown that the regulation of the quantity and quality of the population (Ch. *renkou*) in the name of national rejuvenation was a preeminent concern among the cultural and intellectual elites who envisioned modern government for China in the early twentieth century. In its own program for national rejuvenation, the socialist state began to display a concern with the size and rates of growth of the population in the early 1950s, as it developed a comprehensive economic planning process.

The first national birth planning (Ch. *jihua shengyu*) movement, in the 1950s, focused on propaganda and on the production and distribution of contraceptives, especially condoms, diaphragms, and contraceptive foams and jellies. Though most of this activity appears to have been concentrated in large cities, birth planning also reached the top of the agenda in the remote prefectural capital of Chuxiong in 1957. A birth planning guidance committee was created to propagandize cadres, and exhibitions were organized to demonstrate the use of contraceptives and sell them at low prices (CYZZ 1993, 347). As the Great Leap Forward gathered steam in 1958, however, pronatalism became an element of the optimism required of all cadres, and birth planning advocates were attacked as rightist enemies.

After the Great Leap, the center announced new efforts to promote birth control. Party documents echoed Mao’s words: birth control would “move the birth problem gradually from a state of anarchy to one

of planning” (White 1994, 274). In Chuxiong, birth planning committees were created for each county, and plans were formed to carry out propaganda “first in the cities then in the countryside, first in the plains then in the mountains.” Counties printed handbooks explaining the benefits of contraception and once again held photograph exhibitions and slide shows to demonstrate contraceptive technologies (CYZZ 1993, 348). Before plans to train cadres in the countryside in birth planning work could be put into effect, however, the campaign was interrupted by the advent of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. The issue of birth planning was marginalized for several years as radical politics dominated the agenda.

These first two birth planning movements reached into Yunnan’s county towns, but they had minimal effect in the rural areas.¹ It was during the third mobilization, in the mid-1970s, that birth planning was first carried out systematically in Yunnan’s countryside. Dubbed the “later, longer, fewer” campaign, this was an intensive, well-organized mass mobilization. It encouraged couples to marry later, wait three to five years between births, and have only two children. The campaign was very successful in controlling fertility in the cities, and it created a dramatic decline in birth rates in many rural areas as well (Chen 1976; Greenhalgh 1993). The movement produced an extensive infrastructure for birth planning work throughout the country. Each of Chuxiong’s counties developed a Birth Planning Small Group. County hospitals created birth planning departments, opened birth planning leadership offices, and trained clinicians in the “four surgeries”: vasectomy, tubal ligation, IUD insertion, and abortion. County towns held mass training sessions for teams that would tour the countryside and perform contraceptive surgery at village clinics (CYZZ 1993, 347). Beginning in 1973, more than sixty thousand sterilizations, abortions, and IUD insertions were performed each year in the prefecture, as compared to about seventy-five hundred total before 1970. Chuxiong’s “later, longer, fewer” campaign culminated in 1979 with a mass meeting in which a large group of pregnant women who had already borne two or more children were “energetically required to adopt remedial measures”: after the meeting, 2,597 abortions were performed in twenty days (CYZZ 1993, 354).

Such measures were not applied in most minority areas. The campaign aimed to provide birth control for people with minority status only at their request (Zhang Z. 1986; Peng 1991). A surgical team visited Zhizuo periodically, giving residents their first exposure to any but traditional contraceptive methods.² The team performed IUD insertions, tubal

ligations, and abortions in improvised clinics in the elementary school and the medical clinic. Women with two or more children were encouraged to undergo one of these surgeries, but no structure of inducements and penalties was introduced to force compliance. During the “later, longer, fewer” campaign, Yunnan’s crude birth rate declined from 34 births per thousand to 25 (YSTRB 1990). Nevertheless, the large minority population in Yunnan made the campaign less effective there than in most of China. By 1979, a smaller percentage of fertile couples (54.6 percent) used contraceptives in Yunnan than in any other province but one.

Compulsory birth planning was introduced to Zhizuo in late 1982 and early 1983. The center had announced the one-child policy three years earlier. In response, Yunnan created birth planning regulations differentiating border regions from internal regions, mountains from basins, the countryside from the city, and minority populations from Han (DZY 1991, 2:189). These regulations permitted couples who were both members of a minority to raise two children, regardless of the sex of the first. They also allowed two children to couples in rural households who faced practical difficulties. Chuxiong’s regulations were slightly more liberal, proceeding on the principle that “one child is best, a planned second child is permitted at most” (CYZZ 1993, 351–352). Each set of regulations mandated that three to five years should separate births and that all couples should marry late: women should be encouraged to marry only after the age of twenty-four, men after the age of twenty-six.

Before the rural reforms, cadres in nonminority rural areas had encouraged birth planning through structures of incentives and disincentives. Incentives included maternity leave; extra grain or work points; priority in health care, education, and employment; and distribution of housing plots. Disincentives included the loss of work points and the loss of entitlements to private vegetable plots and housing plots for over-quota children. The introduction of responsibility systems, however, had transformed the style of birth planning enforcement. By the early 1980s, rural cadres no longer distributed resources such as work points or higher education. Contracting land to households had also increased the labor value of children, and expanded incomes made fines for over-quota births less effective.³ Birth planning agencies responded with renewed efforts to mobilize cadres to carry out high-intensity birth planning campaigns, modeled on the mass mobilizations of the Mao era (White 1992). In Chuxiong, a national “birth planning propaganda month” in January 1983 began an intensive effort to extend compulsory

birth planning to mountainous minority districts. More than seven thousand new birth planning cadres were trained, and more than seventeen thousand birth planning surgeries were performed in this one month (CYZZ 1993, 354). In this new atmosphere, Zhizuo residents were subjected to intense pressure to limit births for the first time.



Compulsory birth planning quickly became the most important work of Zhizuo's government. The brigade Party secretary was the birth planning leader, answerable to higher-level authorities. One special birth planning cadre, a young woman, was responsible for birth planning education and propaganda. A female "barefoot doctor" performed gynecological exams and IUD insertion and removal in the village medical clinic. The other four brigade cadres also shared duties of dispensing propaganda, writing reports, and making household visits during birth planning campaigns. Little birth planning work was carried out during the ordinary course of governance. Instead, cadres waited for periodic birth planning campaigns to be organized at higher levels. Indeed, many in Zhizuo believed that cadres allowed couples to have over-quota births during ordinary times to make it easier to complete their quotas of fines to be collected, IUDs to be inserted, and sterilizations to be performed during the campaigns.⁴

Campaigns lasted from a few days to several weeks. Some were simply for propaganda and education; others set specific targets for collecting fines and performing medical procedures. Many included mass meetings, often planned to coincide with the visits of township- or county-level cadres. In the post-Mao era, cadres could no longer simply call a meeting and expect the "masses" to attend. Instead, they sent a youth with a mule to the township center to retrieve a popular film, a projector, and a screen, to be set up outdoors at dusk. The price of admission was to sit through an hour or so of birth planning speeches by local and visiting cadres.

Beyond propaganda, the key work of birth planning campaigns involved door-to-door visits to negotiate with fertile couples. On these visits, cadres attempted to coax women with two children to have an IUD insertion, to persuade those with three or more children to undergo sterilization, or to collect fines for over-quota births. Stainless steel ring IUDs and sterilization were the predominant forms of contraception used in China, accounting for 85.4 percent of all birth control in

1982 and 90.69 percent by 1988 (Deng 1992). Other contraceptives were available at the township clinic, but cadres did not promote them, finding them too difficult to monitor and evaluate. Cadres did not bother with the modest and ineffective rewards allowed by birth planning regulations, such as monthly health stipends and nutrition allowances. Instead, they alternated verbal persuasion with threats of heavy fines and compulsory sterilization. Few in Zhizuo could pay cash fines, but cadres could confiscate livestock from couples with over-quota births. Exemptions from fines or confiscation were frequently granted in exchange for sterilization. Most in Zhizuo feared sterilization: rarely would a man agree to a vasectomy, and few women would assent to tubal ligation after bearing only two children. The infant mortality rate in Zhizuo had historically been very high;⁵ there was still little medical care for infants and new mothers; and women feared that if they agreed to sterilization they might lose a child and be unable to bear another. Those women sterilized in the 1980s accepted the operation reluctantly, as the alternative to a ruinous fine, only after giving birth to a third child.

Brigade cadres found these negotiations with their kin, friends, and neighbors onerous. In many campaigns, they relied on the help of a birth planning implementation team from the township. Since the cadres of this team were not locals, they could afford to threaten harsh penalties without fearing reprisals and without being swayed by sympathy for any household's particular plight. The chief intent of birth planning in Zhizuo was to limit births to two children per couple. Brigade and township cadres considered late marriage regulations unenforceable. They were well aware that local sexual practices exceeded the official designation of "sex" as a procreative act to be performed on the legal site of domesticity" (Dikötter 1995, 186). As described in chapter 3, sex was an accepted aspect of the courting process, which began around the age of fourteen. Girls often became pregnant before reaching the age at which they could legally marry (twenty for women and twenty-two for men under the 1981 marriage law). Abortion was a common consequence of premarital pregnancy. Some girls had babies while living in their parents' houses and continuing to seek spouses. Many moved into partners' households while still teenagers and waited to register the marriage until both partners reached the legal age. Marriage registration was necessary to hold a wedding, but weddings were easily timed to coincide with the legal age of marriage, since by custom nearly all wedding ceremonies were delayed until several years after a couple began cohabiting,

usually until after the birth of a first child. In the 1980s, brigade cadres did not try to fine couples who cohabited before registering their marriages.⁶ In addition, they did not attempt to make newly married couples postpone their first child, did not demand that women with one child accept IUD insertions, and did not collect fines from those who failed to space their births by three to five years.

In carrying out birth planning, local cadres acted as reluctant agents for a masterful state, whose specific demands might be evaded or manipulated, but whose general intent to control the population (Ch. *kongzhi renkou*) infused every aspect of reproductive activity. Brigade cadres made it clear that they did not wish to press for birth planning; this was the state's requirement, not their own. In struggling to mediate between the demands of higher levels and the reluctance of locals, they negotiated compromises to every formal birth planning regulation: some they diluted; others they reshaped; many they made no attempt to implement. Their informal rules for enforcing penalties and exacting birth planning surgeries were fluid, hardening in response to more stringent demands from above, softening in negotiation with specific households. Yet this very fluidity made every reproductive act a matter of official concern, demanding far more exhaustive scrutiny and arbitration than a clear structure of strictly enforced policies would have required. It was brigade and township cadres who surveilled, negotiated, exacted penalties, and operated on bodies. Yet in contrast to the situation in other eras, no cadre could voice wholehearted commitment to state policies; all deferred the responsibility for birth planning policies to higher levels. None claimed to embody the state, as many had in the Mao era. The effect was to represent a state that was impossible to grasp in concrete or human form—everywhere present but nowhere personified, and obsessively concerned with human reproduction.

Zhizuo residents were accustomed to imagining society as instituted in the acts of bearing and nourishing children. Their retrospective dreams of the *ts'ici* system refashioned a former social community as a (re)productive unity, instituted anew each year in the reliquary box's bridal procession, renewed each season in acts of insemination, conception, birthing, and cultivation performed on the muddy womb-fields of the ancestral trust. Now, bearing and nourishing children instituted a relation not with a social community but with an extrasocial state. This relation was no longer founded primarily on productive labor, as it had been in the Mao era. It emerged instead from fertile, sexed bodies: each reproductive act—marrying or not, bearing children or not, undergoing

surgery or not—positioned each household member in relation to an all-important fertile womb. And this relation gave each member an age- and gender-specific place in the new social community: the problematic population, project of state power and its *raison d'être*. Cadres repeatedly proved to fertile couples that their well-being crucially depended on the population, both local and national—its rates of growth, its age structures, and, most important, the area of arable land it allowed to each member. Cadres learned to manipulate demographic statistics expertly to link local poverty with the problem of too many people reproducing too quickly on too little land. But in the early 1990s, this talk began to change. Cadres began to lace their birth planning lectures at evening films with references to “population quality” and to show how the local population was particularly deficient in this regard. Economically and culturally backward, with below average “quality of body” and high incidence of genetic disease, the local minority population was in need of intensive measures of control and reform. This talk associated Zhizuo Lòlop'ò with the Yi population, which had reached 6 million strong and was rapidly growing. And it made the case that this population was responsible for curbing its own growth in the service of national eugenic goals.

A Quality Population

In the early 1990s, demographers and birth planners took note of an “explosion” of unplanned births in the countryside, a growing “floating population” of peasants who had left their villages to seek work elsewhere (among whom birth planning was particularly difficult), and a coming “third baby boom” as those born during a surge in fertility rates following the Great Leap married and bore children. In response, Party leaders sought to extend the reach of the institutional networks that supported birth planning to the village level, where they would routinize and rationalize birth planning work. Increased funds were directed to rural birth planning stations and contraceptive surgery teams; responsibility systems that rewarded cadres who carried out birth planning successfully and punished those who did not were given new teeth; fines for peasants who gave birth to extra children were increased; and households that could not pay those fines were denied land contracts. Some provinces began to construct retirement schemes for peasants so

that they would no longer have to rely entirely on their children to support them in their old age (Greenhalgh and Li 1995).

Central leaders articulated a vision of “holistic” birth planning. Material production and population production should no longer be thought of as separate, they declared. As the forces of material production were gradually released to the control of the market, population production should become the focus of every aspect of the state’s work. Long-term economic well-being depended on further reducing the rate of population growth, but just as important was the population’s quality. A quality population could be achieved only by drawing together every strand of the work of the state into a coordinated network of institutions and practices. Song Ping, then a member of the Party’s Political Bureau Standing Committee, set forth this vision in a *People’s Daily* article in February 1993:

It is necessary to associate material production with population production and associate population production with all aspects of our work. We should adopt a holistic concept of population, which is called by some comrades a “macro concept of population.” As the work on family planning cannot be divorced from economic development . . . we must integrate the effort to solve the problem of population with such issues as developing the economy, supporting poor areas and helping them tap their potentialities, turning resources to rational use, protecting the environment, universalizing education, improving the conditions of medical care and public health, improving family welfare, and solving the [problems caused by the] aging of the population. . . . In conducting family planning it is imperative to attach importance to eugenics and sound child rearing. The quality of the population has a bearing on the rise or fall of the nation and future generations. (*Renmin ribao*, 9 February 1993, 3)

In the interest of population quality, the rural population was to be managed directly by an integrated network of bureaucratic state institutions, through projects of economic development, socialist education, health care delivery, pension plans, postnatal education programs, and welfare programs.

The notion that population quality was crucial for the nation’s future had gained overwhelming support among Chinese intellectuals and planners in the late 1980s and 1990s. This issue had its roots in early twentieth-century discourses about racial rejuvenation and national renewal. Intellectual elites in the Republican era had expressed concern over birth rates that were higher among the masses than in the educated

classes. Some had worried that birth control programs might allow mentally and physically deficient lower classes to swamp the professional classes, who practiced birth control (Dikötter 1995, 120). Many intellectuals in the post-Mao era believed that these predictions had been borne out after several decades of comprehensive birth planning. The health of China's population; its physical stature; its levels of intelligence, culture, and education; its mental health; and the quality of its "thought and morality" were of grave concern, particularly among those who had been allowed to reproduce the most—the rural population, especially its least developed and most culturally backward sectors. Without a comprehensive program to improve population quality, the nation would not compete successfully in the marketplace of the next century.

One object of this discourse was mental and physical defects that were thought to be genetic. In 1988, Gansu Province passed the country's first eugenics (Ch. *yousheng*) law, requiring mentally retarded people to be sterilized before they were permitted to marry. The law was directed at people whose condition was thought to be either inherited or the result of marriage between close relatives, but, as Frank Dikötter (1998, 178) points out, genetic factors were frequently named as the causes of mental health problems that were actually rooted in diet deficiencies (especially the lack of iodine). A national eugenics law went into effect in 1995, prohibiting those with "serious hereditary" disorders, venereal diseases, severe psychosis, or inheritable infectious diseases from reproducing. The law required prenatal testing, followed by termination of the pregnancy if the fetus had a serious genetic or somatic disorder. The discourse of eugenics employed a notion of heredity not limited to genetic inheritance (Dikötter 1998). On the one hand, eugenics aimed at creating a superior population through improving childbearing, nutrition, medical care, and education; on the other, it included the imperative to limit the reproduction of those portions of the population deemed incorrigibly backward in economic and cultural terms. "Idiots breed idiots," as Li Peng famously put it—but the poor, uneducated, undernourished, and medically underprivileged also breed the poor, undereducated, and unhealthy. Many demographers noted that birth planning had been more successful in urban areas than in the countryside, more successful among the literate, the affluent, and the healthy than among the illiterate, the impoverished, and the mentally and physically disabled. Echoing the rhetoric of early twentieth-century eugenicists, a pair of birth planning theorists declared in the prominent Party journal *Qiushi*

that the result was “a phenomenon of negative selection [Ch. *nitaotai*] within the population”:

The better-educated urban population is being submerged by a surging wave of rural births; the population size in industrialized zones is being left far behind by the population size in agricultural regions; the rural population is growing faster in impoverished areas than in more affluent ones; and we have large numbers of above-quota births in areas with high illiteracy rates, while the areas with better-educated populations practice family planning. With regard to the contrast between the healthy and disabled, healthy couples are satisfied with having one healthy child, while the disabled population’s multiple births probably result in children with various types of hereditary diseases. (Yan and Jin 1992, 41)⁷

The urban/rural distinction was one axis on which the qualities of different populations could be compared; another was the divide between Han and minority populations, especially those of the nation’s western half. These non-Han populations were overwhelmingly agricultural and often poor in addition to being relatively uneducated with high rates of illiteracy. They were seen as prone to mental and physical disabilities, as a result of “early marriage and marriage between close relatives.” They were rife with “goiters,” “dementia,” “retardation,” and other diseases and conditions, most of which were “probably hereditary” (Yan and Jin 1992, 40–41). A new scientific discourse also evaluated and compared the population quality of different minorities. One study (Zhang 1995) devised a Population Quality Index to rank the nation’s eighteen minority populations that numbered more than a million.⁸ Population quality, the author declared, has three aspects: “quality of body, quality of culture, and quality of thoughts and morals.” Only the first two can be measured easily—quality of body by measuring infant mortality and life expectancy at age one, and quality of culture by measuring relative rates of graduation from elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. Weighting these measurements heavily in favor of quality of body, the study compared the qualities of China’s minorities to those of the populations of other continents. The Korean and Manchu populations, in the heavily developed northeast, achieved scores as high as those of North Americans, while Tibetans, Yi, and Hani (another Tibeto-Burman-speaking minority in the southwest) had the worst quality, comparable to that of Africans (Zhang 1995, 24). Other studies measured “quality of thought,” using standardized cogni-

tive tests to compare spatial and temporal cognition, analytic and synthetic cognition, perception, and reasoning among different minority groups (Zheng 1996). The minorities of “remote” and “economically backward” regions proved to have the least developed cognitive skills.

This discourse drew urgency from observations that the relative leniency of birth planning policies for minorities had allowed their populations to surge relative to the size of the Han majority. The 1990 census revealed that since 1982, the minority nationality population had grown 38.7 percent, compared to the national growth rate of 14.7 percent, increasing from 6.7 to 8.0 percent of the population (Yang 1993). In Yunnan, the growth rate of minority nationality populations was 29.9 percent in the same period, 17.22 percent greater than that of the Han population (Zou and Miao 1989, 528). Many demographers were careful to point out that much of this growth was a result of changes in nationality composition: since the end of the Cultural Revolution, many more Chinese had claimed minority status than before, including most children of mixed minority-Han marriages. Nevertheless, some birth planners raised nightmare scenarios, claiming that unless population growth in minority areas was more strictly controlled, the minority population could reach 567 million by the year 2048—a shocking 28.5 percent of the national population (Yan and Jin 1992, 38). Moreover, it was clear that populations most deficient in quality were growing the fastest: the natural rates of increase among minorities with high rates of illiteracy and infant mortality were the highest (Yang 1993; Song and Cui 1993).

Yongren County, where Zhizuo was located, was a case in point. By standards of the 1970s and 1980s, Yongren’s birth planning was a success. The crude birth rate had dropped from 20.9 per thousand in 1981 to 17.8 in 1988, much lower than the 1988 provincial rate of 24.0 per thousand (YSTRB 1990). But for those concerned with population quality, Yongren was a clear example of “negative selection.” Birth rates were much higher among the county’s fifty thousand Yi than among its Han population. In 1955, 40 percent of the population had been Yi and other minorities; this had grown to 46 percent by 1980 and to 50 percent by 1988 (YSTRB 1990). These minorities lived in the county’s mountainous regions, where the arable land per capita was minuscule and most households depended heavily on relief grain. They were the least educated and least healthy segment of the population with the highest infant mortality rates, shortest life expectancy, smallest stature and chest size, and

highest rates of heritable disease. Stricter birth planning among this population became an urgent new priority.



In 1991, Yunnan adopted revised birth planning laws, stipulating that one member of every couple of childbearing age with two or more children was to be sterilized. Sterilization, especially of women, had become the contraceptive method of choice for family planners in much of rural China. In most localities, the only IUD available was the single-ring stainless steel IUD, which had a failure and expulsion rate of about 14.3 percent. Nationally, IUD failure had been identified as an important cause of over-quota births (Kaufman et al. 1992, 78; Tu 1995). Planners in Yunnan noted a proliferation of illegal IUD removals by “witches and witch doctors” and other traditional healers. Vasectomy had gradually fallen out of favor among local birth planners in all but a few locations (notably the Sichuan basin) because it encountered too much resistance among men. In contrast, women in many parts of China had come to view tubal ligation operations as relatively innocuous (Greenhalgh and Li 1995). By 1988, sterilization, largely of women, was the birth control method of 49.2 percent of couples of childbearing age nationwide (Deng 1993). In the early 1990s, in the climate of heightened concern over “population quality,” Yongren County administrators chose to carry out the new provincial regulations to the letter. Even minority couples who were allowed two children would be sterilized after the second birth. In early 1993, the county planned an intensive campaign to be focused on the minority population, designed to accomplish the sterilization of every eligible woman.

A Gathering, with Wolves

Zhizuo’s Party secretary Qi Haiyun told me about the campaign’s beginnings one glum October afternoon in Yongren’s county town. I ran into him in the street, slogging through the rain with his two-year-old son on his back. We shared tea in a stall while we waited for the rainy-season downpour to let up. Qi was an edgy, intelligent man of twenty-five, and one of my first friends in Zhizuo. He had grown up in one of the poor villages on the valley’s shady side, where water for irri-

gation was scarce and the fields were small and rocky. He graduated from middle school and married without a certificate at eighteen; his bride had been sixteen. They had lived in Qi's parents' house ever since. Their first child was a girl, now seven years old; the boy was their second. On the strength of his middle-school grades, Qi had been selected to attend a four-month literacy course in the provincial capital shortly after his marriage.⁹ This made him a natural candidate for quick advancement in the brigade government. He had attained the post of Party secretary only a month previously, after the former secretary was demoted over the planting of the ancestral trust. Before this, Qi had frequently taken me aside to ask my opinion on schemes for escaping a poor peasant's life—attending college in Australia, perhaps, or teaching Yi language in Japan. The post of brigade Party secretary paid a meager salary and required him to continue farming his household's land. It was not much of a life, he told me, but he was stuck with it for now. Still, the sterilization campaign might prove an opportunity to show higher officials that he was capable of greater things.

The campaign had begun with a countywide meeting of basic-level Party secretaries. It was imperative, they were told, that they lead their brigades to sterilize all eligible women quickly and comprehensively. Qi Haiyun was promised the full support of the township birth planning team and the police bureau. He had no means to resist, even had he wanted to do so. He commanded none of the power to accumulate and allocate state resources that brigade leaders had wielded in the Mao era, and he lacked the networks of informal relations (Ch. *guanxi*) among higher-level Party and government officials that many had developed since. His ability to make this campaign a success was key to his further advancement, not to mention that of several officials of Zhonghe township, where Zhizuo was the largest and most "backward" brigade.

At the meeting, Qi pledged that every eligible woman in his brigade would be sterilized before spring planting. On the principle that cadres should lead by example, the women of his own household—his wife and his mother—would be first. That had been two weeks before. The previous day, Qi Haiyun and his wife, Li Yuming, had walked to the Yongren People's Hospital, where she was given a tubal ligation. For the next few days, she stayed in bed in a guest room, unhappy and in pain, while Qi Haiyun wandered the mud-sodden streets with his child. Eventually, bus service having been suspended by the rain, the four of us walked back to Zhizuo together over washed-out mountain paths, a fifty-kilometer journey. Qi Haiyun perched the toddler on the back of a borrowed burro so

that Li Yuming would not have to carry baggage. Still, abdominal cramps forced her to rest frequently. On arriving home at dusk, she went directly to bed, where she stayed, intermittently ill, for the next three months.

In Zhizuo, the campaign was delayed for weeks while Qi Haiyun argued with other brigade cadres about tactics. Eventually, Qi walked to the township with a borrowed mule and brought back a movie. He spent a day setting up generator, projector, and screen on a hill between Zhizuo's two largest villages. By dark, hundreds of people had found their way up the hill with flashlights and pine torches. With the generator rumbling in the background and the light from the projector illuminating him like a spotlight, Qi Haiyun stood to announce the campaign. Every woman in the brigade under the age of forty-two who had already borne her quota of two children was to be sterilized before the spring planting season, he said. Each morning, the brigade government would post in each village a list of women to be sterilized. The lists would begin with women under thirty with two or more children who had had an abortion. Next would be all other eligible women under thirty. Women in their thirties and early forties would be last. The day after her name was published, each woman would walk the twenty kilometers to the township birth planning clinic, where the operation would be performed. If she failed to show up, she would be fined 300 yuan, her household's livestock would be confiscated, and she would be handcuffed and led to the clinic, where the operation would be performed without anesthetic.

On finishing his speech, Qi Haiyun signaled to the projectionist. The film, intended simply to entertain, was a spectacularly bad choice, a thriller about a pack of wolves invading a mountain village somewhere in the southwest. It featured gruesome scenes of wolves devouring helpless women and young children. Angered and confused by Qi Haiyun's speech, most adults left early. The children and adolescents who remained sat entranced as shaggy mongrels, playing wolves, coursed over walls and through doorways. The next morning, the names of twenty young women, brushed in black ink on red poster paper, were posted in central locations around Zhizuo.

Spayed Pigs and Fire Tongues

Initially, Qi Haiyun's threats were very effective. In the first two weeks of the campaign, all those whose names were posted

walked to the clinic for the operation. During that time, I sometimes sat up at night drinking with men who agonized over whether to encourage their wives, daughters, or daughters-in-law to have the surgery. These men were furious at Qi Haiyun, fearful for their female kin, and terrified of the consequences of resistance. "They want to sterilize them just like pigs," Li Haicheng fumed after a great-niece was listed. "They want to do them one after another, without anesthetic, like animals." Many others also compared tubal ligation to spaying sows.

The uneven efforts of birth planning teams to disseminate information about contraceptive surgeries had never provided a more vivid or accessible model. Spaying was a common operation, performed at home by ordinary men who had learned the skill from other locals. Sows ready for spaying were already large; it took two or three agile men to catch one and pin it to the ground. The surgeon made a two-inch incision in its side with a sharp knife and slipped his fingers into the wound. He felt for the ovaries, pulled them out, tied the tubes on both sides with thread, cut the ovaries free, slipped the cut ends back into the animal, and stitched up the wound. The operation was noisy and violent. The sow screamed murder; the men swore; blood flew. Women and girls refused to participate or watch, retiring to an inner room until the pig was on its feet again. Such sights could affect a girl's chances for giving birth normally, said Li Qunhua when I asked her why, and as for old women like herself (she was thirty-nine), they found it bloody and unpleasant.

At first, I took comparisons between spaying and tubal ligation to be hyperbolic expressions of the indignity of forced mass sterilization. Soon, however, I learned that they were intended in a more precise sense. One morning, a woman of twenty-five from Qi Haiyun's village collapsed after receiving the surgery. Her family and neighbors carried her across the valley to the brigade clinic and waited outside nervously as she was treated. I ran into Li Zhiwu on the path from the clinic. He was incensed. "It's no better than castration!" he declared. That was ludicrous, I said, losing patience. Going about saying tubal ligation was like castration or spaying sows was silly and irresponsible. It was a false parallel, founded in ignorance, and it could only contribute to the misery of those forced to undergo an operation that, for all its indignities, had few side effects when performed correctly. Li Zhiwu argued with me stubbornly:

LZ: The ancient emperors used to make eunuchs to guard their concubines for them. This is the same, the same thing, only now it is being done by force.

- EM: That's just not true! It's not the same at all! They don't take the ovaries out as you do with a pig; they just cut and tie the tubes.
- LZ: It is the same! The same logic! Exactly the same as a pig! [On the ground he sketched two ovals, with a curved line emerging from both ends of each.] What they do is they cut the tubes here and here, the ones leading from the ovaries to the womb. That cuts off the flow of *và* [sexual fluids] to a woman's vagina. With a pig, it's very simple—you just cut the ovaries out. With people, you can't cut them out, so you cut the tubes so the organs will gradually wither and die.
- EM: But this doesn't mean, as with pigs, that the woman can no longer have sex.
- LZ: Never again. Her entire life. The best a couple can do is lie on the bed and feel each other; they can play around like that. But she no longer feels any interest because there is no longer any *và*. And she can do no heavy labor, because she has no explosive strength, the kind of strength that allows you to lift a load of firewood. And gradually, as the *và* backs up behind the break in the tube, her entire lower torso [Ch. *yaobu*] begins to ache, so she has difficulty moving quickly or carrying heavy loads.
- EM: Yet you say that a tubal ligation is not as bad as a vasectomy!
- LZ: Oh, doing it to a man is the most terrible thing. It breaks up the family, destroys the couple's relationship, and makes it almost impossible for the family to continue to exist economically.
- EM: But, again, it's not the same as making an eunuch. I mean, it only keeps the semen from coming out. It doesn't affect the other functions . . .
- LZ: It does! You know as well as I that for anything to happen, the man first has to get hard. Well, after this operation, he can't get hard, or he can only get slightly, momentarily hard, sort of soft hard. So the couple can no longer do it. And, since after the man is done, there is no need to do the woman, the woman feels interest while the man doesn't. So what happens to this family? The woman can only go wild [Ch. *luan*], go crazy [*t'è*].
- EM: And if it's the woman who is done, the man doesn't go *luan* or *t'è*?
- LZ: No, men can't. Men won't. After all, if it is the man who is sterilized, the couple can't do it at all. If it is the woman, the man can do it—it's just that the woman feels no interest. And if a man is sterilized, he can do no heavy labor. He can't plow or harrow. This is much worse than a woman, who doesn't have to plow anyway. You have a family where the man can't plow and the woman is *luan*, is *t'è*. It's the same for a man as for a woman: he has no explosive strength, and his lower torso gradually begins to swell and hurt so every movement is painful.

Herbalists such as Li Zhiwu had more exposure to birth planning propaganda than most. Nevertheless, they rarely mentioned sperm and egg when speaking of conception. Instead they described a mingling of male and female sexual fluids—*và* (corresponding in many respects to the Ch. *jing* of classical Chinese medicine). In this view, a fetus developed from the dynamic interaction of semen and vaginal fluids. These were the external eruptions of flows that circulated through the body's interior at various volumes and velocities. Together with *sà*, "blood," and *cè*, "breath" (much like the Ch. *xue*, "blood," and Ch. *qi*, "breath," of classical Chinese medicine), they flowed through human bodies, animating them and endowing them with vital energies.

Và was the most volatile of these substances. Its interruption or excess produced abrupt and dangerous transformations in bodily equilibrium. Once for instance, when I was heading to the city for a break, Li Zhiwu told me the story of a young couple who died expending all their *và* in a single night of passion after several months apart (it was an un-subtle warning to control myself). The volatility of sexual fluids was felt in excessive retention as well as expenditure. A woman who had sexual intercourse with more than one man in a single night put herself in danger, for the fluids of the different men could do battle within her, causing sudden illness, painful swelling, and even death. In healthy bodies, the dynamic quality of *và* created surges of energy for quick movement, flashes of inspiration, and explosive strength. Sterilization operations in pigs and humans selected vital nodes in the system of flows, where intervention suspended the circulation of *và* through the entire body. Halting this flow destroyed the body's capacity for sexual interest and surges of strength or inspiration. And, as in similar blockages of sexual fluid that occurred without surgery, the ligature produced a lifelong disability (called *jotsr'no*, or "kidney region illness"), in which the *và* gradually accumulated behind the blockage, creating chronic, painful swelling in the lower torso.

In my argument with Li Zhiwu, his talk of the flows of sexual fluids made men's and women's bodies rough equivalents. The obstruction of *và* had the same effects in each. Gender was not innate to these bodies; it was emergent in the sexual and agricultural economies of their households. Vasectomy and tubal ligation differed in their effects not on bodies but on these economies. Here, sowing and insemination were more than merely metaphors for each other; they were related materially in the flows of sexual fluids. A man who could not get hard was a man who could not plow. In this respect, vasectomy was a catastrophe: it

destroyed the generative nexus of growing rice and raising children that animated household relations. Moreover, compulsory vasectomy would betray the alliance that had been constructed in the post-Mao era between male household heads and the state (discussed in chapter 3). Conflicted though this alliance was, it nevertheless encouraged male household heads to imagine their sexual and economic potency within their households as being sanctioned by the state. Properly governed, their male potency made their productive and reproductive relations social in the widest sense—contributions to the national body. Just how vital this alliance was to male household heads can be seen in the talk about the *ts'ici* system that challenged it (chapters 4 and 5). Dreaming of the past, men evoked a time when the household and community were instituted apart from the state, in the potent male acts of sowing and insemination under the authoritative gaze of the collective ancestor, Agàmisimo. Dreaming of the future, they evoked a time when the Party would sanction a restored *ts'ici* system, bringing household, community, and nation together under a single, potent sign.

In this view, tubal ligation, though unpleasant, was no catastrophe. A sterilized woman continued to contribute to the productive and reproductive economies of her household in a diminished way. She passively accepted the sexual advances of her husband, cared for her children, and performed her agricultural tasks, which required steady endurance and resistance to nagging pain rather than sudden rushes of strength. This intervention was no more than an extreme version of the sexual discipline men had long sought to impose on women (described in chapter 5). It was not the stagnation of sexual fluids that destroyed the integration of a woman's body with the sexual and agricultural dynamics of her household; it was their excess or exuberance. A woman whose sexuality was not domesticated through intercourse with her husband went *luan*, running about chaotically, and she went *t'a*, mad from an excess of sexual energy. Men burdened with unreleased sexual energy might run about to the houses of lovers, might stay up all night and sleep all day, neglecting their work and dissipating their wealth; but they did not tear their clothes, soil their faces, or dance about with no pants on, as women whose men could not perform were known to do.

So went the discussions among husbands and fathers. In the meantime, however, talk in other venues was creating another understanding of tubal ligation. Two weeks into the campaign, women who had undergone the surgery began to gather with those who feared it in central locations: a rock on a canal where women from Chemo washed their

clothes, a spring where women from Chezò drew water, a public grain pounder with a clear view of the village government across a gully. They discussed the surgery's effects, denounced Qi Haiyun and the other brigade cadres, and plotted strategies of resistance. Every morning, ten to twenty women gathered to ambush Qi Haiyun as he emerged from his parents' house. All day they followed him around, shouting at him whenever he set foot outside.

One afternoon, he fled to my room in the school and sat on my bed, miserably attempting to converse with me and Gu Yimin, a teacher in his thirties. A crowd of women filled the balcony outside, laughing and chatting. "What a lot of fuss," said Gu Yimin, slightly drunk. "All over an operation that can't really hurt them." "Only you can know when your abdomen hurts!" shot back one of the women outside, who had been listening in. Once Qi Haiyun gathered his courage and plunged outside, women surrounded him, shouting, poking his chest, and pinching his arms. A group of those who had been sterilized had agreed on a list of four demands, which they shouted at him. First, central policies allowed two children, yet if one of their two should die, they could not now replace the child. Therefore, Qi Haiyun must arrange an adoption for any woman whose child passed away. Second, the operation had made it impossible for them to perform hard labor for the rest of their lives. Consequently, Qi must personally work for each of them all their lives, carrying their firewood, hauling their water, and bearing loads of compost and rice seedlings to their fields—all tasks that demanded the quick strength they could no longer muster. Third, before the operation, they had all been healthy; now they were chronically ill, requiring frequent meals of chicken soup and medicinal herbs. They demanded that Qi Haiyun cover all their medical expenses and buy each of them a chicken a day. Fourth, while it was true that Qi Haiyun's wife had been sterilized and lay ill in bed, his mother and his two married sisters had never had their names posted, even though all three were eligible. Qi was protecting his own family, even as he strove to get rich by destroying every other family in Zhizuo. His closest kin should be sterilized like everyone else.

These demands established a perspective on tubal ligation that was clear even to men, like Li Zhiwu and myself, who could not participate in the talk that generated them. In this perspective, tubal ligation was a catastrophic obstruction of the energies that animated bodies and households. Every woman in Zhizuo had close experience with the deaths of infants and children; all could easily imagine losing one or

both of their offspring. As it destroyed their ability to renew their households in case of disaster, sterilization also damaged their households' economic capacities. Sterilized women could continue to labor at the stereotypically female-gendered tasks that came most quickly to mind for married men like Li Zhiwu: transplanting, weeding, harvesting, sieving, pounding, and winnowing grain. Yet women's daily labor *did* require the explosive energy believed to be depleted by sterilization: lifting back-baskets full of firewood, hauling heavy loads of rice seedlings, shouldering paired water buckets, and carrying huge baskets of compost. These were all bearing (*bù*) tasks, central to the poetry of grief, with which women in Zhizuo mourned their dead ascendants and siblings. Sterilized women feared that, by depleting their capacity for bearing, the surgery had robbed them of the ability to bear and nourish their living children, as their parents and siblings had borne and nourished them.

Men feared that vasectomy would disrupt the balance of sexual energies in a household, causing its women to go mad (*t'è*). Women feared that as it swelled their lower torsos with an accumulation of stagnant sexual fluids and depleted their interest in sexual activity, tubal ligation drained them of precisely this capacity for chaotic and destructive exuberance. We saw in chapter 5 how fears of such feminine excess came to light in talk about rice transplanting. They also found frequent expression in talk about dance. Dance took many forms, from the nighttime partying of youth to the ritually prescribed dances of elderly women at weddings and old men at funerals. In many ritual contexts, dance drew on feminine reproductive capacities to establish new ensembles of relations. At weddings, for instance, ritual dances performed by the bride's female kin renewed the reproductive potential of the groom's household by moving the soul of the bride from her home to a seat beneath the fertile gaze of her husband's ancestors.

Yet in dance, women also disrupted the channels into which their kin sought to direct their reproductive potential. Night dances at weddings and in the first lunar month gave women, married and unmarried, myriad opportunities to establish liaisons with interested men, raising the possibility of capricious reproductive choices. Young women who displayed immoderate enthusiasm for dancing, singing, playing the mouth harp (a courting instrument), and dressing up in embroidered clothing were often diagnosed as having been driven mad (*t'è*) by an entity called *srkanè* and treated with a rite to drive away this ghost of a girl killed by a jealous lover.¹⁰ Watching their female kin dance, men feared a chaotic

slide of reproductive power or sexual energy into destructive excess. Yet for women who danced madly, possessed by “itchy feet” or the joy of movement, dance was an expression of both bodily exuberance and a sexual potential that mocked the controlling glances of kin. The surgeon’s scalpel, they feared, would rob them of both.

When used as a verb to mean “to go mad” or “to become possessed,” *t’æ* puns easily with the verb *t’a*, “to lust” with animal lust. Older men in Zhizuo had long dreamed of exercising control over the “lust” of their female kin. The verses once muttered to the Lòhə, guardian of the ancestral trust fields, were a ritual means to this end: “daughters of the fourth month, don’t bloom! plug their vaginas with mud! stop them up with green seedlings! pinch their wombs with fire tongs! don’t lust, don’t lust!” (fragment 5.12, in chapter 5). Now male household heads were being asked to collaborate with another entity, more mysterious than the Lòhə and far more efficient, to achieve this same end. Most complied, reluctantly escorting their wives or sons’ wives twenty kilometers to the birth planning clinic. Some, however, eventually rebelled.

A Bitter Image

Many men regarded the swelling crowds of furious women with mixed amusement and respect. “They are *so* angry!” Gu Yimin exclaimed. “Every day, they go to the brigade government to argue with the cadres. Then they come back and spend the rest of the day talking. It’s their way of spending their time, now that they can’t work. They demand that the state [Ch. *guojia*] feed them for the rest of their lives. The cadres there can only say, ‘We haven’t a pinch of rice here, but you can come to our houses to eat.’” “They have guts [Ch. *danzi*]!” said another man. “Some of those women walk right into the houses of Qi Haiyun and the brigade chief. They lie down on their beds and refuse to move. ‘Now you can take care of me for the rest of my life!’”

Other men found in these demonstrations inspiration for their own acts of resistance. Unnamed youths made nightly attacks on the brigade government building, breaking down the doors, overturning the tables, and destroying the pots and pans. The brigade cadres, who often lived in this building, secluded themselves in their houses or departed for remote seasonal settlements. One night, a beautiful, tile-roofed footbridge

that had graced the tail end of the valley for more than a century burned down to its timbers. It was possibly an accident, a lovers'-tryst campfire gone wild, but the township police took it as further deliberate sabotage. The night after his wife was sterilized, one young man went from house to house drinking and trying to convince people to help him ambush and kill Qi Haiyun. "If this were the north, Qi Haiyun would be dead now," said the man who told me of this. "He is alive because we Lòlop`ò are so passive. But we have other ways of taking revenge." Some previous brigade Party secretaries had died mysteriously at night, others reminded me.

Initially, little discussion was given to apportioning blame for the birth planning campaign. Qi Haiyun and the brigade cadres, rather than any more distant institution or set of policies, were the clear focus of anger and resistance. Fury at Qi Haiyun was magnified by the sense that he had violated an unspoken agreement that brigade cadres should always put the interests of their locale over those of the state or their own, using every resource at their disposal to deflect the most harmful of state policies from their locales. Cadres in the neighboring brigade of Bozhedi had acted differently, I was told:

The Party secretary there told the people, "We have been informed from above that all women under the age of forty-two should be sterilized. But whether you comply with this policy is your business, not ours." He told the township government, "Look, there are only four of us cadres. There are hundreds of women eligible for sterilization, and every one of them will resist. What are we four to do? If you want to force them, it is up to you to send enough police to make it happen." And then he went back to the people and said, "In our opinion, none of you should volunteer for this surgery." So now Bozhedi has been granted special exemption from the campaign, as a particularly poor mountain village.

It was true that Qi Haiyun was inexperienced, it was said, but if he had had a scintilla of human feeling, he would have devised similar tactics. Instead, possessed by greed and ambition, he sterilized his own wife first and then energetically pursued others.

Meanwhile, Qi Haiyun's life was miserable. He spent much of his time at meetings at the township and county levels, where his superiors took him to task for the deteriorating relations between the Party and the masses in his brigade. When he returned to Zhizuo, he was hounded everywhere by angry women. It was spring plowing season, and he scrambled to plow his fields; he was the only member of his household who could handle a plow. His wife had not recovered from her surgery,

and he spent the pittance his official post paid buying chickens to feed her as she lay in bed. His parents, with whom he lived, were angry. His mother, forty-three, had five children, and she had recently undergone an abortion. Her neighbors and former friends were demanding that she be sterilized, but she was afraid. She blamed her son.

The campaign ended abruptly, a week before the lunar new year. Concerned about reports of unrest in Zhizuo, the Yongren County government assembled a team of cadres from the Nationalities Commission, the Birth Planning Association, and the Police Bureau to visit the brigade. The team brought a movie projector and a generator, and they announced a mass meeting outdoors. The meeting, which began at dusk, was very well attended. Angry women surrounded the officials, arguing with them. A member of the Birth Planning Association rose to speak, going over once again the goals and rationale of the birth planning campaign. A few stones flew out of the crowd. They missed the official, but one struck a baby strapped to a woman's back. The speeches ceased, the movie was canceled, and the crowd broke up as the mother rushed her baby to the medical clinic. Before leaving the next day, the team announced that the sterilization campaign would be suspended in Zhizuo.

The end of the campaign did not make Qi Haiyun's life easier. Seeking to deflect anger from their level of government, the county team denied that there had been a policy of compulsory sterilization. All birth planning surgeries were voluntary, they said; policies stipulated that refusal could be punished only by a fine of 300 yuan. The loss of livestock and sterilization without anesthetic for women who resisted were not official policy, but had been terrors invented by the brigade Party secretary. Visiting cadres criticized Qi Haiyun openly in front of other Zhizuo residents for mounting an inhumane campaign. The women who had been sterilized—more than eighty in all—followed Qi Haiyun around in crowds, openly pinching and poking him. Nightly sabotage of the brigade government building continued.

One night, when Qi Haiyun's wife and parents were away helping a neighbor prepare for a wedding, six women pushed their way into his house and shouted at him for more than an hour. When they left, he tied an electrical cord to a ceiling beam and hanged himself. The cord broke as he kicked away the stool under his feet. Returning to find him on the floor, his parents put him to bed with a sore neck. I saw him at the wedding the next day, pale and unhappy, wandering nervously from one pine needle "table" of guests to the next, shoveling down a bowl of rice

at one, then getting up again. I did not know of Qi Haiyun's suicide attempt, but it struck me as sad and serious that he could not even participate in this fundamental act of commensality. He invited me home with him. "If I had the money," he said, "what I would most like to do is buy a truck or two." "What would you do with a truck?" "Become a truck driver. Being an official is too bitter."



Qi Haiyun's suicide attempt seemed to soften his neighbors' attitudes toward him slightly. "That boy's life will be unbearable now," said Li Wuyi. "He wanted so badly to become an important official and get rich, but now he will never be an official. He will never be chosen again, for brigade Party secretary or any other job. His kin all hate him, and his household is so poor he has to borrow an ox to plow his fields. What could have made him do this to himself? He is not stupid; he is a very bright young man. How could he ruin himself and so many other people? People are now saying that it is *yik'ù amù wo*; it could only be *yik'ù amù wo*."

We have seen this phrase once before, at the beginning of chapter 6. *Yik'ù*, the "bitter herb," was remembered to have spread over the landscape during the Great Leap Forward, an omen of calamity. *Amù wo* might be translated as "power from the sky" or even "evil from the sky." *Yik'ù* combines the sense of a vast bitterness returning from the past with a portent of catastrophe to come; *amù wo* brings together the sense of evil descending on the head of a particular person or household and the ubiquitous descent of calamity into every corner of the landscape. The phrase is used in reference to irrational and widely destructive acts perpetrated by otherwise thoughtful people, as in the Great Leap, when the deeds of so many defied everything that was just, moral, or even self-interested. "It is like some strange thing from the sky came into his head and disturbed his thoughts," expanded Li Wuyi, "forcing him to bring disaster on himself and on everyone."

Li Wuyi did not use this phrase in a trivial sense. He had thought the matter over carefully, he said, and many others agreed with him. It seems clear that this consensus was implicit recognition that Qi had not been driven simply by personal greed and ambition; rather, he had been in the grip of higher forces that had distracted him from the good of the community, even from his own good. But if so (I found myself asking), why could Li Wuyi not simply say so? Why did he resort to this vague,

mystical vocabulary when he could have said something more along the lines of my own analysis of Qi Haiyun's behavior?

My explanation focused on the ways in which decollectivization and market reforms had deeply altered the structure of state power in the countryside, shifting it largely away from basic-level cadres and toward a network of administrative agencies, such as birth planning associations, nationalities commissions, development committees, and the police. Qi Haiyun had been promoted to the post of Party secretary as part of this shift. Those who recruited him knew that he enjoyed none of the contacts or experience that allowed older and craftier brigade cadres (like those in Bozhedi) to subvert the demands of higher administrative levels. This restructuring, combined with his own inexperience, gave Qi Haiyun less power to manipulate such demands in the interest of his locale than any brigade Party secretary in memory. This was particularly clear in the context of the most recent push for more stringent birth planning, which, as central leader Song Ping put it, was to be the foundation for a "holistic concept of population" and a unified structure of governance. Basic-level cadres like Qi Haiyun were seen to be crucial to this push. New structures of rewards and punishments for birth planning successes and failures more effectively pressed these cadres to implement the policies of higher levels. Qi Haiyun's options for resistance or subversion were highly constrained, then, and immense pressure was brought to bear on him to carry out the campaign efficiently.

At the same time, agencies at higher levels of government took advantage of the fact that basic-level cadres were the most visible proponents of birth planning in their villages and the natural targets for popular resentment. They encouraged the local cadres to make threats, although the agencies were not willing to back them up in case of trouble. When resistance became overwhelming, these agencies cut the ground out from under Qi, halting the campaign, denying that it had been meant to press so far, and joining in attacks on him and the other brigade cadres. If Qi was to be blamed for anything personally, it would be inexperience, a degree of thoughtlessness about the consequences of ambition, and ignorance of the current nature of state power. The "strange thing" that "came into his head and disturbed his thoughts" was simply a certain gullibility about the state and its promises.

These are my own words, of course, but Li Wuyi and many others in Zhizuo certainly possessed the conceptual vocabulary to have said something similar. Indeed, some individuals had done so, in a fragmentary way, on other occasions. They had been assiduously taught the Chinese

analog of this language of organizations, channels of power, policies, negotiations, and resistances. It was the vocabulary employed by the state and its agencies, and many years of listening to speeches, attending political meetings, and hearing newspapers read to them had drilled them in its intricacies. Why, on this occasion, did Li Wuyi speak instead of the “bitter herb from heaven”? The question supposes that he was simply voicing thoughts about Qi Haiyun’s instrumental relation to state agencies in another, metaphorical language. This premise—that the language of Chinese folk religion relates to political language as the extended term of a metaphor to its proper term—has been foundational for the anthropology of China. It underlies nearly all discussions of the “Imperial metaphor” in Chinese popular religion—the tendency of these religions to imagine analogs in the world of ghosts and spirits to the world of official bureaucracies. Put simply, these discussions assert that Chinese peasants speak of gods, ghosts, and ancestors as metaphors for officials, strangers, and kin, perhaps to legitimate state authority, perhaps to learn about it, perhaps to resist or manipulate it.¹¹

In Li Wuyi’s invocation, the phrase “*yik’u amü wo*” did not use metaphor to rehearse such an assessment of Qi Haiyun’s place in a determinate political order. It did not “mystify” or “misrecognize” the state by refashioning it metaphorically as the realm of the sky, from which power descends. Instead, this phrase participated in a very different language, with different aims. This was the language of the ritualized poetics of materials and words to which much of this book has been devoted. It was a resource for thinking *past the limits* of the vocabulary of political determinations and effects toward that which was most fundamental about state power to the lives infused by it. It was a resource for thinking about coexistence with a state imagined as a forceful unity, not merely as a collection of organizations, policies, or causes and effects. It reflected on the image of this unity as fundamental to the “imaginary institution of society,” without which social life would not be possible (Castoriadis 1987). Read in the syntax of this language, the phrase “*yik’u amü wo*” invoked the state as at once an alien Other, vast and distant as the sky, and an interior Other, a “strange thing” disturbing one’s own thoughts. It was at once utterly impersonal, with no human analog, and deftly intimate, penetrating head and womb to disturb what was within. Like the “bitter herb” (as *yik’u* in Lòlongo), it was general, infusing every corner of the inhabited landscape and, in particular, infecting the generative unity of body and house. And like that herb (as *yiku* in Chinese), it was a reflection of past bitterness and a portent of calamity yet to come.

Conclusion

Two weeks after the end of the sterilization campaign, county and prefectural officials returned to Zhizuo to participate in the Clothing Competition Festival (Ch. *saizhuangjie*). This was the centerpiece of state efforts to celebrate the reform-era revival of “nationality customs” in Yongren County. It had been held since 1987 on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, when Zhizuo residents had once gathered to celebrate the transfer of the title of *ts’ici* from one household to another with feasting and dance. The prefectural Nationalities Commission had published an official myth of the festival’s origins, purged of references to the *ts’ici* (Gao and Yang 1989); and newspaper and magazine articles described it as an exuberant, aesthetically exciting, and politically innocent “traditional Yi festival.” Its main event was a three-day-long dance on the outdoor site where movies were shown and mass meetings held. Though skeptical at first, many in Zhizuo had come to look forward to the festival as a chance to dress up in their finest and dance. Delegations of officials usually came to open the festival and watch the dancers; choreographers came to gather material for folk dance troupes; photographers came to capture images of Yi women dressed in bright embroidered clothing for feature magazines about minorities; members of the tourist commission came to investigate the festival’s possibilities as a tourist attraction. During the day, hundreds of women and children danced in giant circles, their fingers interlaced; after the visitors went to bed, crowds of men from all over the region joined in, dancing around bonfires until dawn.

This year, however, the visitors were disappointed. Only about a hundred women and children showed up to dance. All wore drab daily clothing rather than the brilliant floral pink-and-red embroidered trousers, blouses, and aprons for which they were famous. In the mid-afternoon, a drunken gourd-pipe player in the center of the circle of dancers slipped and fell, smashing the gourd of his instrument on the ground. Distressed, he held up the fragments for the dancers to see. As news of this event made its way over the dance ground, all the women stopped dancing and scattered. “A bad omen,” said Li Qunhua quietly, refusing to elaborate before she headed home. Angry clusters of official visitors sat around on the empty dance ground until dusk, when the school principal fed them and locked them in their rooms to keep them from harm. Only after the visitors had retired did some of the dancers return and dance around the bonfires until dawn.

Gourds (*ba*) were, of course, central symbols of generative unity. Society had emerged from a gourd. As recounted in chapter 3, a pair of siblings who had survived the flood had lived in their womblike gourd in self-sufficient union until a leaf of the droop-leaved plant had slipped between them, introducing difference into their intimacy and allowing them to give birth to the social world. Gourd-pipes were models of this generative difference in its most harmonious form: womblike gourd skins, penetrated by airy bamboo rods, cemented with beeswax, emitting chords in perfect thirds, a dream of domestic unity. A special pair of large gourd-pipes with double gourds had once led the wedding procession of the reliquary box from one *ts'ici* household to the next, cementing them together as symbolic affines in a dream of generative community. These were the most fragile of dreams, betrayed continuously in practice as people struggled to cope with the incessant violence of their position on the fringes of the nation, reaffirmed in memory and ritual technique as people repeated tales of past unity or sent the ghosts of past violence off to their origins. The mass sterilization campaign had cut these dreams to their core. Dreams of domestic unity had been betrayed again as surgeons' scalpels sliced to the center of the closely inhabited world, crippling bodies and disabling houses. Dreams of generative community had been destroyed again, as the campaign set neighbors and kin against one another, creating hatreds as fierce as those engendered by the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution.

What was the agent of this violence? This question had emerged repeatedly as people rehearsed tales of the returning ghosts of previous decades' violence. Now it was as pressing as ever and still more difficult. The county officials watching from the hillsides above had voiced the most convenient answer: it was Qi Haiyun, son of Li Siting and Qi Yun, an intelligent but avaricious youth, briefly this brigade's foremost leader, soon to be the poorest of peasants again. Many in Zhizuo repeated this assertion: some of the women dancing in drab aprons at the Clothing Competition Festival were the same who had demanded that Qi Haiyun personally care for them the rest of their lives. Yet by leaving their embroidered clothing at home, these women signaled that they felt another gaze, personified neither by the miserable Qi Haiyun nor by the chief of the Family Planning Association or the uniformed leader of the Police Bureau. It was a gaze elusive of comprehension, present only fleetingly in imagination, yet nonetheless real. It circumscribed their pasts, summing them up as members of the "Yi nationality," economically backward, with generally inferior qualities of body, culture, thought, and

morality. It circumscribed their futures, as it counted and assessed their fertile and infertile wombs, keys to their uncertain place in the vast national population. Their hope of finding a richer past and future lay in collective acts like their aborted dance, which drew the daily arts of living in body, house, and landscape to open up this elusive gaze to the force of imagination.



It was that night that Qi Ping slipped into the brigade government building and did her mad dance. I like to think of her up there, plinking a pot around the courtyard, leaping over the tables and stools. Another prankster grandmother, Luo Lizhu, once told me a tale of the mythical Jimiabamo, who used to wander about these mountains playing tricks on people. Once Jimiabamo slipped into an empty house to steal honey. When the family came home, she found herself trapped in the attic. She emptied a pot of honey up there, took off all her clothes, rolled around, and then dumped a bag of wool over herself. She ran down the ladder, holding her clothes under her arm. The family was terrified: “What kind of animal was that? What kind of spirit?” Jimiabamo ran to the river, washed herself off, and got dressed. One young man, smarter than the rest, followed her. “But this is no spirit, Grandmother, it is you!” “Child,” she replied, “you don’t know me. I’m not your grandmother; I *am* a spirit!” (And she was.)¹² I like to think of Qi Ping emerging from the brigade’s attic, its seat of patriarchal power, from whence the reproductive capacity of all in the villages below was regulated, saying to the young man who thought to find her out: Child, you don’t know me! You don’t know my powers, my despair, the music of my body, the exuberance of my will. In none of this am I another depleted womb for your count!

Still, I know that as she faced that wall with its neatly chalked commands, Qi Ping faced worse terrors than any Jimiabamo encountered in her adventures. Qi Ping had been very poor her entire life and was growing poorer. She had been assigned to a devalued population, obsolete in the nation’s crusade to compete effectively in the next century’s global market. Her three children and two grandchildren would be further impoverished by a predatory, state-sponsored capitalism that was depleting these mountains of their remaining natural resources to enrich the cities and coasts. Their access to medical care was deteriorating as the system of state medicine broke down and hospitals and clinics demanded fees

for their services. As a result, they were found to be ill-favored of body, intelligence, and mental health. They had gained little education, and they would be unlikely to gain more, as elementary, middle, and high schools rapidly increased fees and tuition. As a result, they possessed almost nothing of "culture," as it was measured by those who led the quest for a "quality" national population. In this quest, all their intricate arts of living, all their subtle practices of community, all their best poetic words counted for nothing at all. Qi Ping and her progeny could look forward only to further campaigns to reform these arts for increasingly alien ends.

Under the circumstances, dancing madly was a pretty good response.