Throughout this book, I use the term Chinese Party-state, as opposed to Chinese nation-state, to describe contemporary China. I use this term as a specific allusion to the imaginary single-party political fabric that the CCP has attempted to stretch across China’s multiethnic territory since “Liberation” in 1949. In the Chinese Party-state, the CCP is the hegemonic form of the polity; the CCP not only dominates all aspects of government and political life, but also maintains considerable influence over the public sphere. Another unique element of the Chinese Party-state is the subservience of the People’s Liberation Army to the CCP. I do use the term nation-state on several occasions throughout this book in reference to China. This distinction between the Party-state and the nation-state is important. However, the conflation of these terms is difficult to avoid. For example, in this introduction, I use western theories of modernity and the nation-state to examine the ways in which the Chinese Party-state is governed. Although these theories are relevant to our analysis, they do not account for the intricacies of the Chinese Party-state.

This era is referred to in Chinese as gaige kaifang: the era of “reform and opening up.” The era is also described in English as the reform period or economic reform period. This book generally uses the term reform era.

In standard Chinese, the word Nujiang consists of two separate words: nu, meaning “angry,” and jiang, meaning “river.” However, the river’s name actually derives from a Chinese phonetic interpretation of the local name for the river. In this case, the word nu derives from Nong (or Anong), the name of the people who originally occupied the northern reaches of the Nu River and from whom the river takes its name. The Anong are a subgroup of the Nu ethnic minority group (Sun and Liu 2009 [2005]: 1, 12–13). The word Nujiang is used interchangeably to describe both
Nujiang Prefecture and the Nu River. To avoid confusion, in this book *Nujiang* designates Nujiang Prefecture, and *Nu River* the river itself.

The Lisu are Nujiang’s dominant ethnic group. In 2004, they composed approximately 51 percent of Nujiang’s total population of 480,400 people (Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Government of the Nujiang Lisu Nationality Autonomous Prefecture 2006).

4 The Nu River is known as the Salween River upon entering Burma.

5 Despite their importance to the local rural economy, these types of transactions are not recorded in official government statistics.

6 The program is more accurately translated as “returning cultivated land to forest or grassland.”

7 This tendency is not reserved to authoritarian governments such as China’s. In his article “The Liberal Government of Unfreedom,” Australian political scientist Barry Hindess (2001) delineates the contours of liberal political reason and its application to western societies such as Australia’s. He notes that although western liberal democracy hinges on the autonomous actions of self-governing members of the population, western governments also recognize that certain sections of the population do not have the same capacity for self-improvement and therefore require more intervention and direction from government (see also Dean 1999: 131–48).

8 Maintaining unity and stability in these border areas, where local communities often share strong cultural and kinship ties with communities in neighboring countries, is of particular concern to both central and local governing authorities. Consequently, local officials are generally wary of outsiders, particularly foreign journalists, missionaries, nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers, and researchers.

9 As part of the central government’s efforts to assist economic development in China’s western peripheral regions, experts and teachers from more economically developed parts of the country often temporarily transfer to disadvantaged areas such as Gongshan for periods of up to several years.

10 All names in the book are pseudonyms unless otherwise indicated.

11 As its title suggests, James C. Scott’s 1998 publication *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* provides historical analysis of this dilemma.

12 We should also acknowledge that some mainland Chinese scholars have been critical of the privileging of western theories and ideas in nonwestern contexts, questioning the tendency among some Chinese intellectuals to appropriate western conceptions of modernity for their analysis (see Li Tuo cited in Davies 2007: 38).


14 Officially, the ideology of the CCP is informed by Marxist, Leninist, and Mao Zedong Thought. Since 1997, Deng Xiaoping Theory also has been added.

15 The theory that human society progresses through specific stages of development was first proposed by Morgan (1885 [1877]), later appropriated by Marx and Engels, and then formalized by Stalin.

16 The Great Leap Forward campaign sought to rapidly transform China from an agrarian economy into an industrial power via the collectivization of rural labor
Notes to Introduction

and the swift acceleration of industrial production. It was a disaster: agricultural output declined dramatically and tens of millions died of starvation (Dikötter 2010). Concerned that bourgeois/capitalist elements were increasingly shaping CCP policy, Mao Zedong orchestrated the Cultural Revolution to institutionalize Maoist orthodoxy, rid China of its traditional cultural values, and dislodge his political enemies. The period was characterized by widespread political, social, and economic turmoil and the purging of intellectuals and those regarded as having bourgeois leanings (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006).

Refer to “Equivalents and Abbreviations” for information on currency conversion.

Yan Hairong roughly translates suzhi’s meaning as “the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity . . . [and] a value articulation of human subjectivity” (2003a: 494).

The Han are China’s dominant ethnic group, composing approximately 91.51 percent of the population (National Bureau of Statistics of China Online 2011: section 3.5).

The Qinghai-Tibet railway began operation in 2006.


This process of classification was based upon the writings of the United States anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (Gladney 2004: 60). In his publication Ancient Society, Morgan (1985 [1877]) suggests that societies progress serially through stages of development. Essentially, they move from savagery to barbarism and eventually toward civilization.

This most recent official figure was recorded following the 2010 census.

China’s ethnic minority groups vary considerably in both size and geographical dispersion. The largest, the Zhuang, number more than sixteen million and are concentrated in the west of the Guangxi Autonomous Region (see Kaup 2000). One of the smallest groups, the Dulong (Drung), number approximately six thousand and are concentrated in rugged and isolated Dulongjiang township in the west of Gongshan.

The ambiguity of ethnic identity is captured particularly well by Stevan Harrell in Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China (2001).

There are also ongoing disputes about the composition of the fifty-six ethnic/national categories.

As Thomas S. Mullaney (2011: 40) notes, it is inaccurate to assume that each of these four hundred groups constituted a distinct, self-aware ethnic group yearning for political recognition. Among the four hundred groups listed, ninety-two recorded populations of fewer than one hundred people. Of those ninety-two groups, twenty recorded populations of a single person (ibid.: 36). A large number of groups were listed because the census question relating to ethnicity did not provide predetermined responses—respondents were allowed to self-categorize. Mullaney concludes: “Whereas there were clearly groups for whom the census did in fact constitute a moment of politically self-aware assertion, the remainder appear instead to have been individuals who were simply improvising responses to a question they had never heard or considered before” (ibid.: 40).

This was not the first instance in which the CCP officially recognized China’s ethnic minorities. Article 14 of the 1931 CCP constitution states that the Party “recognizes the right of self-determination of the national minorities in China, their right to complete separation from China, and to the formation of an independent
state for each minority” (cited in Gladney 2004: 11). Upon coming to power in 1949, the CCP considerably toned down its policy toward ethnic minorities, with references to secession removed (ibid.: 12).

29 Ethnic minorities were not exclusively targeted for persecution during this period: across the country, millions of Han and non-Han were killed and countless religious and cultural institutions were destroyed in the name of class struggle and the “Destruction of the Four Olds” (Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas) campaign.

30 In 1980, Hu Yaobang, then the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP, led a working group to Tibet to investigate local conditions. During the visit, Hu became acutely aware of the deleterious impacts of Chinese interventions in Tibet, precipitating an important turning point in government policy directed toward China’s ethnic minorities.

31 These are the Ningxia Hui Nationality Autonomous Region, the Xinjiang Uighur Nationality Autonomous Region, the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Guangxi Zhuang Nationality Autonomous Region, and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

32 In fact, autonomous areas are subjected to greater supervision and intervention from the CCP than areas that are not designated as autonomous.

33 The constitution stipulates that the titular head of government of an autonomous area must be from the ethnic minority group to which that autonomous area was nominally bestowed. This stipulation does not apply to the party secretary, a position that outranks the titular head of government.

34 Gongshan’s ethnic minority officials, from the village committee (cunweiyuanhui) up to the county government, are required to study at the local Party school.

1. Life at the Periphery of the Chinese Party-State

1 In post-Enlightenment Europe, an intense curiosity developed about the exotic botanical diversity of the “East.” This curiosity was acted upon by the so-called plant hunters, such as Francis Kingdon Ward, George Forrest, and Joseph Francis Charles Rock, who were sponsored by government and private plant collectors to venture to the East to uncover new plant species (see Glover et al. 2011; Muegglar 2011). Many of the newly discovered specimens collected by the plant hunters eventually would be propagated and displayed in public and private gardens in Europe. However, their ventures into areas such as northwestern Yunnan, Tibet, and eastern Burma were often made for purposes that extended beyond botanical curiosity. For example, Ward’s Mystery Rivers of Tibet (1986 [1923]) is clearly written with the protection of British interests in Burma, as well as the potential for British imperial expansion into western Yunnan, in mind (212).

2 This is an important distinction between Yunnan’s main ethnic minority groups and some of the ethnic minority groups concentrated in Tibet, Xinjiang, and even Inner Mongolia (Mackerras 2003: chapter 3). For instance, in Xinjiang, the Uighur ethnic minority group have historically exhibited strong nationalistic sentiments and deeply resent the large (and ever-increasing) Han presence within their nominally autonomous region. Uighur separatist groups have carried out violent forms
of resistance as well as organized terrorist attacks against state institutions (ibid.: 49–54).

This name is spelled Fei Hsiao-Tung in the Wade-Giles transliteration system.


Yun = cloud(s); nan = south.

Scholar-magistrates of the imperial court who were assigned to Yunnan regarded it as a punitive posting. The journey from Beijing to Kunming took approximately four months. According to one analysis, “Unscrupulous Mandarins who had the misfortune to draw such a distant assignment usually saw to it that they made their profit in short order, with slight regard for the welfare of the helpless populace” (Cressey 1934: 373).

While China had had a long history of relying upon native leaders in the governance of non-Han populations living in its rugged peripheral regions, it was during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) that an institutional relationship began to develop between the imperial court and these native leaders. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), this relationship was formalized via the official establishment of *tusi* offices (Herman 2006: 136). Although the *tusi* exercised a high degree of autonomy in governing the population within their dominions, they were expected to demonstrate loyalty to the imperial authorities, particularly during times of armed conflict with hostile military forces both within and beyond China’s border. In so doing, they not only provided the imperial court with a useful military buffer against foreign forces; they were also a convenient, cost-effective mechanism to govern areas where it was not economically viable to establish formal governance arrangements.

There had been Han migration into Yunnan prior to this period. However, it had been on a relatively small scale and was largely government organized. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is estimated that more than one million settlers moved to China’s southwest as part of government-organized migration programs (Lee 1982: 714).

That said, the indigenous population, including the *tusi*, were never completely displaced from the southwest. In a process best described as acculturation, many indigenous communities successfully adapted to the changing cultural and economic environment that accompanied increased Han in-migration. They not only learned Chinese and lived side by side and intermarried with the new migrants; they also adapted to their more intensive agricultural techniques and traded with them at local markets. Still, the nature of their engagement, or acculturation, was often selective and shaped by self-interest (Giersch 2006: 216–17).

This region is featured in the British Broadcasting Corporation’s *Wild China* documentary series (2008).

The Irrawaddy in Ward’s account is actually the Taron River, a key tributary of the Irrawaddy. In contemporary China, the Taron is known as the Dulong River (Dulongjiang), which dissects Dulongjiang township and from which the
Notes to Chapter 2

township draws its name. In its upper reaches, including the section that flows through northwestern Yunnan, the Yangzi is known as the River of Golden Sand (Jinshaijiang).

12 Today Changputong is known as Bingzhongluo, one of the five townships that constitute Gongshan County.

13 According to one account, the name Gaoligongshan itself derives from the standard Chinese transliteration of a local indigenous language, and it is said to mean “Gaoli Clan Mountain” (Xu Xiake cited in Giersch 2006: 17).

14 Changputong was a standard Chinese approximation of “Tra-mu-tang,” the Tibetan regional name for the area. Tra-mu-tang means “the flat plain on the [river] bank” (Ward 1986 [1923]: 193). It is one of the few areas in Gongshan with a substantial expanse of flat agricultural land.

15 Extracts from this report have been translated and published by Herold J. Wiens (1967 [1954]).

16 This is most likely Zhiziluo, the focus of the documentary Ghost Town by Zhao Dayong (2008).

17 These landslides are not caused by agricultural practices alone. Government road construction is one of the major causes of soil erosion and landslides in Nujiang, although this is rarely, if ever, noted in official accounts.

18 This figure was calculated using Nujiang’s 1986 rural population figure: 365,000 people (Gao 2003: 10).

2. Nature Reserves and Reforestation

1 As Tania Murray Li contends: “Trustees use a particular population’s failure to improve (to turn nature’s bounty to a profit), or to conserve (to protect nature for the common good) as rationales for their dispossession, and as the justification to assign resources to people who will make better use of them. . . . This myth is alive and well in national bureaucracies and transnational agencies promoting agricultural development and conservation” (2007: 21).

2 I employ pseudonyms for hamlet names in order to protect the identities of the people residing there.

3 Although this has provided local communities with a lucrative source of cash income, it also has created conflict over access to local resources. Furthermore, it has exposed local communities to global economic fluctuations, and the 1998 Asian financial crisis led to a dramatic decline in household income among some communities in northwestern Yunnan. Those most affected were women, for whom the mushroom trade provided an opportunity to contribute to household income (Yeh 2000: 277–78).

4 As James Harkness notes: “Institutionally, setting up forest reserves in southern China has at times facilitated resource degradation as relatively effective community management institutions (xianguiminyue) are replaced by extremely weak state ownership, creating a de facto open access area and inviting over-use” (1998: 921).

5 The five central tasks are (1) “Speed up the construction of the economic base” (Jiakuai jichu sheshi jianshe); (2) “Earnestly strengthen the protection and construction of the ecological environment” (Qieshi jiaqiang shengtai huanjing baohu
The damaging practices, which include cutting down forest and opening up marginal land for agriculture, were actively promoted by China’s governing authorities during the Maoist era as a means to increase China’s grain self-sufficiency.

This is not to suggest that all of the marginal agricultural land that has been nominally converted to forest via the SLCP has been on slopes greater than 25 degrees. In their investigation of the implementation of the SLCP at a site in western Sichuan, Trac et al. observe that local governing authorities converted land with an average slope of only 17 degrees, even though they reported to higher-level governing authorities that all of this converted land was on slopes greater than 25 degrees (2007: 287).

Hoang (2009) has made similar observations among upland communities in a northwestern frontier valley of Vietnam. He notes that following the replacement of customary rights of access to forestry resources in old-growth forests with bureaucratic management and surveillance of these resources by local governing authorities, local people who had traditionally accessed these resources feel little or no incentive to report on illegal encroachment.

At the time of writing, it is unclear whether the SLCP subsidies have continued beyond 2011. In the absence of other accessible income-generating opportunities for much of Dulongjiang’s adult population, it is likely that they have been replaced by larger direct cash payments from local government.

This type of prejudice is not unique to China and can also be found in upland ethnic minority communities in Vietnam (see Hoang 2009).

The process of applying for permission to cut down trees for housing is as follows: Each hamlet appoints a forest protection officer to act on behalf of the County Forestry Bureau, and if a household needs to fell trees, they must first apply through the officer. The officer makes an inspection to find out how much timber the household plans to fell. Following the officer’s approval, the household must then gain a stamp of approval from their village committee. After receiving approval from the committee, the household then can apply for a timber-felling permit from the township forestry station. However, if the amount of timber the household plans to fell exceeds the amount that can be approved by the forestry station, they must seek permission from the County Forestry Bureau.

3. ALL IS NOT AS IT APPEARS

In Singapore, Confucianism was utilized by former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to justify strict authoritarian rule over a largely ethnic Chinese population.

As early as the Shang dynasty (1700–1100 BCE), common people could access a school system that taught them the “rituals of social life.” A basic examination system was also in place to appoint officials to government office (Cleverley 1991 [1985]: 1).
3 It is important to acknowledge the significant epistemological rupture that emerged during the late Qing period, when concerns over national strength and racial deterioration intersected with emerging fields of social scientific inquiry and statistical analysis to precipitate a shift toward a more meticulous management of human life (see Dikötter 1992; Sigley 1996). The contemporary focus on population quality and the scientific management of the population represents continuity with these early interventions.

4 Statistics suggest that illiteracy elimination programs in place between 1949 and 1955 had little impact on the national literacy rate. By 1955, the national illiteracy rate still stood at 75 to 80 percent (Peterson 1994: 110–11).

5 Nevertheless, ethnicity alone is not a marker of low literacy and educational levels. In some cases, literacy rates among Han students living in ethnic minority regions have been only slightly higher than those of ethnic minority students (Postiglione 2000: 54).

6 The Gongshan Education Bureau produced this report for the celebrations marking fifty years since Gongshan had been officially recognized as a county.

7 This statement is somewhat contentious, as the Tibetans had their own written script. It is most likely meant to imply that the Dulong, Nu, and Lisu did not have their own written scripts and that the local Tibetans were illiterate in their own language. Protestant missionaries invented a written script for the Lisu language in the early twentieth century and eventually translated the New Testament into it.

8 According to Harrell, “notching sticks and tying knots” is often employed as a metaphor for classifying peripheral groups as primitive remnants of ancient societies (1995: 15). Such a simple form of recording gestures toward a “savage” mind. Even though preliterate groups may have used an array of sophisticated recording techniques, the metaphor has become a truth associated with all preliterate groups. Groups that are labeled as using these techniques are regarded as equivalent to ancient people.

9 These pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the people residing in these hamlets.

10 According to a document provided to the author by the national Ministry of Education in Beijing, in prefectures such as Nujiang, the cost of tuition and miscellaneous fees is divided between the central (80 percent) and provincial (20 percent) governments. The central and provincial governments also cover the cost of textbooks. Living expenses are split among the provincial, prefectural, and county governments (Education, Science and Culture Office of the Yunnan Provincial Finance Department/Finance Planning Office of the Yunnan Provincial Education Department 2007: 7).

11 10 mao = ¥1.

4. MIGRATION FROM THE MARGINS

1 Aside from surplus rural workers traveling to cities in search of work, the mobile population also includes people from urban and rural areas who travel to other urban and rural areas to undertake various activities, including business, tourism, seeing doctors, or visiting relatives.

2 At various times, the state has organized rural-to-urban migration for specific industrialization programs. Furthermore, during the Cultural Revolution there
was a large wave of urban-to-rural migration orchestrated largely by the state. Most of these migrants were students who were sent to the countryside to “learn from the peasants.” Many of them remained in the countryside throughout the Cultural Revolution.

It is mainly poor rural areas that export surplus rural labor. Many rural areas in coastal and interior regions have net in-migration because they have local manufacturing and other industries.


Weber’s (2007 [1976]) account of the impacts of rural-to-urban migration upon rural French society in the nineteenth century provides some striking parallels to the situation in contemporary China.

Pierre Bourdieu defines *habitus* as “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions” (1977: 82).

Murphy conducted her research in several rural counties in Jiangxi Province, southeast China. Despite its state of relative economic underdevelopment, Jiangxi is in close proximity to China’s prosperous coastal provinces and has been a major rural migrant-sending area since the beginning of the reform era.

During the first two decades of the reform era, rural-to-urban migration was generally less common among the ethnic minority population. This situation changed dramatically during the 2000s, and by 2010 it was estimated that 10 percent of the ethnic minority population (over 12 million people) were engaging in outward migration for work (*China Daily*, November 18, 2010a).

In 2008, a one-way bus ticket to Liuku, the prefectural seat, was approximately 55 yuan. A bus ticket from Liuku to Kunming, the provincial capital, was approximately 110 yuan. A train ticket from Kunming to a major migrant-receiving area on China’s coast was another several hundred yuan.

The author undertook this survey in Ali and Menke hamlets between December 18 and 24, 2006.

This social engineering agenda is not unique to Nujiang and can be found in many other poor rural areas involved in labor export (see Murphy 2002; Yan 2003a).

This document was provided by the Gongshan County Labor Bureau.

These findings reflect Murphy’s study of returning rural migrants in Jiangxi (2002: 88–123).

Evidence of inbuilt discrimination against ethnic minority groups was also witnessed by Heberer (2001: 223) in Liangshan Prefecture, in neighboring Sichuan. Liangshan is one of China’s poorest and least economically developed areas. The Nuosu (part of the ethnic conglomeration officially categorized as Yi) are the main ethnic group in this area. Heberer notes that although industrial colonization and development were taking place in Liangshan, it provided limited benefit for the local ethnic minority population. According to Heberer, colonizing industrialists chose to employ outside labor rather than members of the local ethnic minority population, who were considered to be unsuitable for the work being undertaken. Nonetheless, discrimination is not necessarily one-way in Liangshan. Subsequent research undertaken by Heberer (2007) revealed that Han entrepreneurs engaging in business activities in Liangshan felt themselves to be at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Nuosu entrepreneurs, mainly because it was more difficult for Han entrepreneurs to create and maintain relationships with officials in the local Nuosu-dominated government administration.
CONCLUSION

1 The documentary *Ghost Town* by Zhao Dayong (2008) vividly captures the perseverance of Lisu and Nu identity and religious worship despite six decades of CCP rule, while also highlighting the social dislocation associated with recent modernization. The documentary was filmed in Fugong, the county directly south of Gongshan.