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Strategic Cosmopolitanism: Chinese Female Jadeite Live Streamers in Ruili

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Abstract

With China's construction of free trade zones and the development of digital technology, immigrants from Myanmar and internal migrants from all parts of China have gathered in Ruili, a cross-border hub connecting the two countries. As a result of these mobilities it has been transformed into a grass-roots level cosmopolitan area. Through six years of fieldwork, this study found that grassroots female live streamers who were excluded from mainstream metropolises gained more opportunities for survival and development in jadeite cross-border trade activities in Ruili through the concepts of female entrepreneurship and everyday strategic cosmopolitanism. The notion of strategic cosmopolitanism refers to non-elite openness as a strategic response to economic, employment or career advancements generated by policies, discursively presented as economic cosmopolitanism. The increase in economic gains for some has significantly improved their socio-economic status, while at the same time paying the price of being locked in the logic and rules of capitalism.

Keywords

Strategic Cosmopolitanism, Female; Jadeite; Live Streamer; Border Port; Ruili; China

Introduction

Jadeite trade is a traditional China-Myanmar cross-border economic exchange activity. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, caravan merchants gradually transported jadeite from the rugged and dangerous Hpakant Jadeite Mine in Kachin State in northern Myanmar to China. The area of Tengyue (now the central city is Tengchong) north of Ruili was the largest distribution center. Originally, there were many ethnic minorities here. Already in the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), the Mongols set up a *zhou* in Tengyue, and the Ming and Qing dynasties established a *ting*¹. Consequently, it became part of the administrative center of the most southwestern part of the Central Plains Empire. The Han people who migrated here introduced the jade culture of the inland Central Plains to this region. They excavated jadeite as a species of jade and brought it into the royal family of the Central Plains Empire through exchanges such as tribute, gifts, and trading (Yang 2023). Until now, jadeite has become the most popular jade variety in the Chinese jewelry market. Historically, the ethnic groups involved were mainly Han Chinese in Yunnan, Kachin and Shan people in northern Myanmar, and Muslims who migrated between China and Myanmar. After the border installment between China and Myanmar, the Han people lived across the border like other ethnic minorities, and both sides had their own ethnic and kinship networks, while continuing to engage in jadeite trade activities. The Bamar, Wa, De'ang, Rakhine and other ethnic groups also gradually embraced the jadeite trade over time.

In the practice of the traditional jadeite trade, shops dealing in jadeite are generally husband-and-wife stores. Men do the buying and processing, make decisions, engage in physical activity and networking, and oversee all aspects of the business. Women are responsible for raising children, looking after shops, selling goods. Overall, they assist in running the business. This model of labor division in family business is representative in China, that is, the man is in charge of the outside realm and the woman engages in in-house activities. Housework takes up most of women's time, making it difficult for them to go out to work. However, as female work does not directly generate money, so women's position in the family is highly precarious and undervalued. The disadvantaged status of grassroots women is even more distraught. Lacking education and personal income, they are confined to the family business, with a low status and cut off of any opportunity for upward mobility. Even if they venture into the global metropolises in eastern China, they can only work at the bottom of society.

However, this situation has been altered by the new type of cross-border connective hub (Song, Chahine, & Sun 2020) represented by Ruili, which is an inland border city in Yunnan Province in Southwest China and the largest land port between China and Myanmar. It is surrounded on three sides by Myanmar's territory like a peninsula, and Jiegao port located in the southeastern part of the city is directly connected to Myanmar by land since the building of the Jiegao bridge in 1989. Indeed, in the late 1980s, the Chinese government expanded its foreign economic management authority, and Ruili became a first-class national port in China². The blocked border between China and Myanmar was gradually opened. The ancient Tengchong Jade Route, previously interrupted by the political blockade, was soon diverted into China via Ruili. The flow of goods and merchants converged, transforming Ruili in a cross border connective hub. This trend was strengthened with the implementation of a series of port opening and development policies by the Chinese government, and the traditional jadeite trade order also underwent –significant changes. Among them, female participants represented by live streamers embrace cosmopolitanism as a strategic tool in their everyday lives to seek upward mobility in society. This paper examines the migration and everyday cosmopolitan practices of these grassroots female entrepreneurs in a traditionally peripheral and

1 *zhou* (州) and *ting* (厅) are the titles of certain administrative divisions in Yuan dynasty and Ming and Qing dynasties respectively.

2 In July 1987, the State Council of China approved Ruili as a national 'first-class port'.

landlocked border port city that over time has been transformed in a cross border regional hub. This kind of development as opposed to the global cities in the East shows the variegated forms of urban development in China (Song, Chahine, & Sun 2020). This leads to the question of how we can grasp the bottom-up responses of marginal groups to the development policies of top-down state planning?

General Outline

The concept of cosmopolitanism in the academic literature can roughly be understood as comprising two different dimensions or categories: cosmopolitan aspirations and norms on the one hand, and cosmopolitan practices and capabilities on the other (Amit & Gardiner Barber 2015). The latter refers to specific activities of actors, who are usually presented as not only enduring difference in a passive manner, but also ‘voluntarily’ participating in intercultural relations, and thereby acquiring multicultural competence and familiarity (Hanerz 1990). In order to study Ruili, a peripheral inland border port city built by the power of the state, we divide cosmopolitan practices into two categories: One is the top-down economic cosmopolitanism of national discourse or vision, and the other is the bottom-up every day strategic cosmopolitan practices of marginalized groups.

First, the discussion revolves around the changes in policies and discourse adopted by the Chinese government to build and develop Ruili border port city, followed by a discussion of the policy, and the rapid development of Ruili’s digital infrastructure that has attracted a large number of immigrant groups from Myanmar and all over China to this place in order to participate in cross-border jadeite trade activities. This part discusses the discourse of economic cosmopolitanism in national policy, that gave an impetus to the formation of cross-border connectivity of people, goods, ideas and imaginations. The following part delves into the content, impact, and nature of the everyday strategic cosmopolitan practices of Jade female live streaming vendors through six years of ethnographic research in Ruili. Finally, a critical reflection is provided on how a new kind of strategic cosmopolitanism emerges as a result of the changes in the social structure brought about by state power compounded by survival schemes and development skills of individuals. Cosmopolitanism becomes an opportunity and a strategy for grassroots women to help them adapt and excel, which we like to call ‘everyday strategic cosmopolitanism’.

Visions and Divisions in the Discourse of Economic Cosmopolitanism

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping launched the ‘internal reform and external opening’ policy (Zhao & Li 2018), by incrementally expanding foreign economic exchanges, gradually releasing various restrictions on the domestic market and investment places and thus allowing private economic development. Ruili, located in the remote western frontier of Yunnan province, became a national first-class port in the late 1980s. However, it was not until the early 1990s when Myanmar transformed from ‘Burmese-style socialism’ to a ‘market economy’ (He 2001) that bilateral economic and trade exchanges gained traction.

In fact, until today, the military conflict in northern Myanmar has not ended, impeding the bilateral trade, including that of jadeite. There are 11 ports between Yunnan and northern Myanmar. Only the Myanmar ports connecting Ruili’s Jiegao and Wanding are under the actual control of the Myanmar government authorities, while the other nine ports are all within the territory of the local armed forces of ethnic minorities. Jiegao is a border development zone, and Wanding an economic development zone. They both fall under the administrative jurisdiction of Ruili City and have customs leading to Myanmar. Connected with Jiegao is Muse port in Myanmar, and connected with Wanding is Pang Hseng. As a port, Jiegao is significantly larger than Wanding. Jiegao (Ruili)-Muse represents the largest land port between China and Myanmar. The jagged mountain landscape aggravated by political upheaval hampers the development of Ruili, which economically lags behind the eastern coastal ports. However, it still manages to continuously attract grassroots level people and local ethnic groups from all over China, as well as many

ethnic groups in Myanmar, to participate in economic exchange activities with specific local characteristics, especially in relation to the jadeite trade. After more than three decades, Ruili has forged a cosmopolitanism that is markedly different from that in mainstream metropolises along the eastern coast.

BUILDING FREE TRADE AREAS: COSMOPOLITAN DISCOURSE AND ECONOMIC COSMOPOLITANISM

'Kunming belongs to China, while Ruili belongs to the world.'—YMR, a respondent from Ruili³

The western inland border area constitutes China's fringe zone, where an open and diversified economy is embraced reflecting China's basic national policy centering on economic construction. An open economy through trade and investments allows for the emergence of a peaceful and stable geopolitical environment in the southwestern frontier. Therefore, regardless of the situation in neighboring countries, the implementation of this national policy has always been maintained. The internationalization of a border urban space through top-down, national policy promotion can be conceived as a vision and practice of economic cosmopolitanism.

As early as 1980, the Yunnan provincial government issued a series of policies to allow the legalization of mutual markets and small-scale border trade on the China-Myanmar border⁴. A mutual market refers to the commodity exchange activities conducted by border residents (of China and the other country) in the border area within 20 kilometers of China's land border, at open sites or designated bazaars, approved by the government.

In 1985, the central government decided to open the entire state of Dehong Prefecture as a border trade zone ([Dehong Dai Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture Chronicle Compilation Committee 1997](#)), and it became a national first-class port two years later. In 1992, the State Council changed the administrative status of Ruili from a county to a city, included it in the list of open border cities, and established a border economic cooperation zone ([Zhao & Yang 2012](#)). After experiencing the global economic crisis in 1998, in order to stimulate the recovery of border trade, the Chinese government began to implement a special management model of 'domestic borders and foreign borders' in Ruili's Jiegao area in 2000. The rules reduced or exempted tariffs, value-added tax, circulation tax, consumption tax and other taxes on the flow of goods in the region, simplified customs clearance procedures, in order to sustain Ruili's border prosperity. In 2010, driven by the Chinese government's 'Western Development' strategy, Ruili was established as a key development and opening up pilot area.

In 2019, in a new round of national free trade zone construction, Dehong Prefecture has become one of the three pilot free trade zones in Yunnan, with its center located in Ruili. The government's development orientation for the Dehong Free Trade Zone targets the development of industries such as cross-border e-commerce, cross-border production capacity cooperation, and cross-border finance, while creating a pioneering zone for opening up along the border and a gateway hub for the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. Although these development goals have not yet been achieved, they have crystallized in the representation of Ruili as a cross-border regional hub, based on a geopolitical and economic foundation and driven by the digital economy. As a major regional economic hub, it is labelled as a 'multi-level compound open economic system' by the government. In addition, one of the core concepts of governance in the Xi Jinping era is the notion of 'a community of shared destiny'. This notion, by discarding the unit of the nation-state, privileges the common interests and development of social groups hailing from different

3 Interview time: 27/01/2021. Location: Ruili Duobao City Jadeite Live Streaming Base. Informant: YMR.

4 Prior to this, China implemented a public-owned planned economy system, prohibiting private economy, coupled with the tense political relations between China and Myanmar, border trade was prohibited.

regions, cultures, ethnicities, and so on under the framework of the authoritarian Chinese state. This concept aligns with a particular kind of top-down state-driven cosmopolitanism, that has transformed the city of Ruili.

In addition, certain concepts supporting the China's national power discourse have also a deep impact on the building of a Ruili-style cross-border hub. 'A Community of Shared Future' constituting one of the core concepts of governance in the Xi Jinping era is grounded more in a Chinese-style transnational/cosmopolitan than national discourse. Previously, when China interacted with the world, it focused on the country as a unit. The 'community of destiny' weakens the uniqueness of the national unit in practice. It emphasizes the common interests and direction of individual or group actors and people of different cultures, nationalities, and races in the world under the framework of the Chinese state, and hopes to find specific items and practical content for win-win cooperation in the reality of diversity and difference. This vision is consistent with the cosmopolitan vision, at least in terms of multi-unit relationships and norms. Therefore, together with specific policies, it shapes Ruili's urban space. For example, Jiegao has the Ruili International Jewelry and Jadeite School, a cross-border e-commerce industrial park, and there are multiple e-commerce live broadcast bases in Ruili City, and so on. The Ruili International Cultural and Sports Center, which is under construction, has a construction scale of 181,200 square meters, including several sports venues, art galleries, libraries, and cultural centers ([Yunnan Provincial Design Institute Group Co., Ltd. 2018](#)). These event spaces still seem insufficient to meet the government's vision of Ruili as an economically cosmopolitan metropolis. Therefore, the government plans to build an international dry port new city on the east side of Ruili Old Town. The construction project is expected to occupy an area of 48.4 square kilometers, involving industries, transportation hubs, urban construction, port trade, and logistics development. The new city will focus on internationalization, modernization and ecological innovations. It will also be supported by the collection, combination, and exchange functions of economic dynamics such as people flow, logistics flow, capital flow, and information flow, thereby boosting the development of cross-border trade, processing, warehousing, economic and technological cooperation, tourism shopping, finance and other service industries and infrastructure construction. Therefore, in the respondent's narration, the cosmopolitan concept of Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, seems to represent more of an administrative concept and understanding based on its political status and attributes rather than on the economic, social and cultural dimensions as in the case of Ruili a flexible space where different mobilities, functioning as a cross-border hub ([Song, Chahine, & Sun 2020](#)) are intersecting. Hence the saying: 'Kunming belongs to China, and Ruili to the world'.

JADEITE LIVE E-COMMERCE AND DIVERSIFICATION OF MIGRATION

The planning and investment of Ruili by Chinese governments at the infrastructure level in conjunction with the support of a series of generous policies, Ruili rapidly attracted a large influx of new migrants, both internal and international. According to official data, Ruili has a permanent resident population of about 220,000. However, during the COVID-19 epidemic from the beginning of 2020 to the end of 2022, Ruili experienced 13 quarantines, and barbed wire fences were built on the open national boundaries that originally crossed farmland, villages, mountains, and rivers. According to several respondents, there may have been 400,000 to 500,000 people in Ruili before the pandemic. The closure of the city made it impossible for most people to do business. A large number of shops were closed, and half to two-thirds of the people left. Around the middle and late 2022, the leadership team of the Ruili Municipal Government went to the jadeite distribution center in Pingzhou, Guangdong, to negotiate with large jadeite companies, live streaming platforms, and jadeite merchants who moved there due to the quarantines in Ruili, hoping that they would return. We were unable to find exact figures for the floating (migrant) population, but what is certain are the following data: 1) these migrants are new migrants attracted by port construction; 2) their number may not be smaller than the resident population; 3) they are the main participants and labor

force in Ruili's economic development and urban construction; 4) a large part of them is engaged in jadeite trading activities.

With the construction of China's digital infrastructure, Internet companies such as WeChat, Taobao, and Douyin, have successively launched e-commerce businesses, including online transactions and payments. Since 2015, Ruili's jade trading activities have been transformed into an e-commerce model. Previously, Amazon-like Taobao provided online stores and transaction services. However, due to the nature and characteristics of jadeite itself, displaying goods in stores only through pictures and texts cannot establish sufficient trust with consumers. Therefore, the e-commerce model of selling jadeite on Taobao has not flourished. WeChat, the most popular social media in China, swiftly opened the online payment market through the 'red envelope' function in 2014, reorganizing users' economic and social activities so that they can have the company's advantages and profits (Plantin & de Seta 2019). As a result, the jadeite WeChat business has become active. Outside several jadeite trading markets in Ruili, at eight or nine o'clock every morning, a row of WeChat merchants can be seen sitting on the side of the road on their own small benches. With borrowed goods on their laps, they carefully take pictures with their mobile phones, accompanied by sales introductions. They send photos and 10-second videos to WeChat Moments or WeChat groups to showcase their goods to customers. Economic transactions based on social activities have greatly increased trust in long-distance jadeite transactions, and a large number of migrants have entered Ruili to engage in the jadeite WeChat business. At this time, jadeite transactions have transformed from the traditional offline model to the new online model. However, the pace of change in digital technology is excruciatingly fast. After only two or three years of doing business using WeChat, jadeite's e-commerce quickly entered the live streaming media era nowhere it still operates. It was also during this period that Ruili saw the largest influx of new migrants. The live streamers showcase and trade jadeite goods to fans through platforms that provide streaming media services such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and Taobao. Like WeChat merchants, they do not have to stockpile goods. They perform as middlemen to help fans bargain with buyers in Myanmar or China and collect commissions from them. The largest group of these live streamers originates from Jiangxi, followed by other major groups hailing from Henan and the three northeastern provinces, namely Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning. In contrast to mainstream cosmopolitan areas attracting elite migration, these new 'grass root level' migrants in Ruili are generally not well-educated. Very few of these 20- to 30-year old migrants have a college degree or above, originating from rural areas and underdeveloped towns. Since live e-commerce can be applied to any category of jadeite and any key nodes of the commodity chain of the jadeite, they roam the city and get involved in all types of jadeite markets. In the process of the government's construction of Ruili as a cross-border hub, physical live streaming bases or platforms covering online and offline businesses have also been established. Ruili's live streaming bases consist mainly of Duobao City, which was built in cooperation with Douyin, and its counterpart Everything Good, set up in cooperation with Taobao. They have become new economic activity spaces operating in parallel fashion to the original jadeite market but with completely diverging operating models. It is noteworthy that they attract most of the new migrants. These spaces do not operate in isolation but show different forms of internal intersection. The participation of the immensely diverse group of migrants in the jadeite trade embodies the high interconnectedness of the trade through everyday enactments, inter- and intragroup entanglements and thus jointly constructing the Ruili-style cosmopolitan city landscape.

FEMALE STRATEGIC COSMOPOLITANISM: THE EVERYDAY PRACTICES IN PORT SPACES

From a gender perspective a clear trend in female entrepreneurship in China has evolved over time. This is to say, the position of female Chinese entrepreneurs has improved. At the onset of the first decade of the millennium, most Chinese females engaged in entrepreneurial activities out of necessity rather than driven by opportunity as in the case of male entrepreneurs (Hernandez, Nunn, & Warnecke 2012). Necessity-

driven entrepreneurship among females is partially corroborated by the findings of [Deng, Xu, and Alon \(2011\)](#) that characterizes Chinese female entrepreneurs as '[being] aged 25-44, emphasize education and knowledge, balance work and family lives, are service-business oriented, and are often entrepreneurs by necessity' (2011, p. 13). In a more recent work by [Huang et al. \(2022\)](#) they found that the innovativeness of female entrepreneurs enhanced opportunity recognition and development. Moreover, their psychological capital of belief in the business and resilience when facing adversity impacts in positive ways the entrepreneurial performance. Yet, enduring gender stereotypes might affect negatively women's ability to recognize and develop opportunities. However, their findings demonstrated that gender stereotypes only had a moderate impact on the psychological capital levels of the women in their study. They did not entirely undo the mediating effect of psychological capital between innovativeness and entrepreneurial performance, contrary to previous studies. This might suggest that with increasing educational levels of females along with the developments of contemporary women's awareness of gender equality, these stereotypes impact less and less on their psychological capital. Their digital savvy might also contribute to overcoming the economic and cultural obstacles for female entrepreneurs in China ([Wiig, Kalum Schou, & Hansen 2023](#)).

Besides female entrepreneurship we will introduce the concept of strategic cosmopolitanism ([Pécoud 2004](#); [Kothari 2008](#); [Jeffrey & McFarlane 2008](#); Smith & Jenkins 2011) in order to better understand how non-elite or grass-root level migrants mobilize cosmopolitan skills in order to survive or even to advance their ethnic businesses. It serves as a strategic response to economic survival and career advancement. Pécoud argued that German-Turkish businesspeople display a kind of cosmopolitanism that is characterized by its non-elite, practical and half-conscious dimensions ([Pécoud 2004](#)).

Business is a concrete activity that requires actual skills and in this respect, cosmopolitan competencies are essential to business success. This implies that cosmopolitanism is not always a matter of entrepreneurs' will or pleasure. ([Pécoud 2004](#), p.16)

[Kothari \(2008\)](#) contended in his work on street traders from Bangladesh and Nepal living in Spain that these global peddlers as transnational migrants who develop and deploy specific forms of cosmopolitan sensibilities and identities. These processes unfold when they move in and among different contexts that are interconnected through social and spatial networks, informal economic activities and survival strategies. Finally, [Jeffrey and McFarlane \(2008\)](#) focused on the performance dimension of non-elite cosmopolitanism of a particular type of street performer.

"But the baturupiya may represent a particular type of cosmopolitan sensibility. He has a history of traversing geographical and cultural boundaries. Crucially, for this collection, he performs cosmopolitanism as a strategic resource: as a set of imaginaries and practices that can be used to extend opportunities or consolidate power.: ([Jeffrey & McFarlane 2008](#), p. 420)

The study on internal female migrant vendors in the Silk Street Market in Beijing ([Pang, Sterling and Long, 2015](#)) foreshadows the processes and practices of non-elite female strategic cosmopolitanism. In the Silk Street Market these females gain upward mobility and thus contribute to the welfare of their family by acquiring everyday cosmopolitan skills.

Following the above research on female entrepreneurship and strategic cosmopolitanism we argue that the sensibilities and properties of non-elite strategic cosmopolitans resonate and even align with the dispositions and practices of jadeite live streamers in the different port spaces. They are mostly Chinese-speaking women, displaying a strong affinity with jadeite jewelry. In addition, they explore and exploit what they consider 'female' skills that give them an edge in social media. They have more empathy and the ability to generate trust with their customers. Both their affinity with the trade and the excellent communication skills reflect their psychological capital of belief in the business and resilience as grass-root level females engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, one of the principal characteristics of the current Ruili

jadeite trading activities is that some women constitute a striking, powerful and influential group. Under the premise of the same low level of education, some of these women benefitted tremendously from mastering social media technology, which has deeply changed their status in the family. They achieved upward mobility, and as a consequence their position in society becomes more equitable. As the main force of the social media economy, they actively engage and cooperate with other ethnic groups in the cross-border region of Yunnan and Myanmar across social and spatial networks to achieve mutual benefits, displaying an openness to new rules, values and cultures, and thus developing and reflecting cosmopolitan sensibilities, practices and performances at the grassroots level with a strategic dimension.

STANDING OUT: COSMOPOLITANISM AS FEMALE BONDING

In China, Internet platforms that offer live e-commerce services mainly include Douyin, Kuaishou, and Taobao. They initially provided social services for users. Users register an account on the platform, and display, express and communicate by publishing short videos and live broadcasts. With the access to online payment services, live streaming platforms acquire the function of online economic transactions. Due to the intuitive, vivid and interactive information dissemination process, live streaming platforms have become more popular among users than social media platforms that can only display pictures and text. Unlike industrial products, the characteristics of jadeite are difficult to standardize. As its visual perception is ever-changing, and a minor difference can cause a significant price fluctuation, there are obvious limitations in online display with pictures and texts. The display method of live streaming overcomes this deficiency, so the online transaction of jadeite as a commodity rapidly flourished with the support of live streaming technology.

A live streamer needs to be able to communicate effectively and engagingly and female live streamers seem to excel in these qualities and thus outperforming their male counterparts. The live streamer is an in-between person. She physically goes to the sales site to help online fans bargain with the seller, and assists them in purchasing the goods, while collecting a commission. She seems to be protecting the interests of consumers, but in practice, the commission does not only come from consumers, but also from sellers. Therefore, in the jadeite trade, the live streamer is not only a silent intermediary, but rather a vital link for cross-cultural and cross-border interaction. The simplest live streaming operation team consists of two to three broadcasters on shift, supported by one to two sales assistants. The time when fans are mostly online is after getting off work, and these time periods are also the busiest time with the highest transaction volume. The live streamer takes real-time pictures through the mobile phone camera, displays the goods in the virtual live streaming room and interacts with fans. Fans can only communicate with the live streamer in real time through text, emoticons, and likes. In order to attract fans, the live streamer has developed her own methods: First, she generally does not show her face, but displays only a certain part of her body according to the jadeite category. For example, a broadcaster who trades bracelets and rings only reveals her hands and the goods, and the same is true for someone who sells pendants, but both will guide the attention of the fans to the quality of the goods and the explanation of aesthetic appreciation. This is very different from most other female live streamers who - more often than not - need to rely on standardized female beauty norms. Second, each of them has devised her own communication style. Some live streamers tell stories about jadeite culture, others talk about Burmese customs, and still others elaborate on jadeite jewelry and outfits, and so on, all in order to enchant potential fans.

One of the key respondents is Ah Xiang, whose live streaming room only offers high-end jadeite bracelets with price tags beyond 100,000 yuan (13,000 euro). Her fans consist mostly of wealthy women in China. The latter have their own businesses or run companies, but they earn high incomes. In terms of marital status most are single, and others are married with or without a child. Unlike the mainstream consumption patterns in China where men pay for women, these female customers have sufficient purchasing power to buy high-end jadeite. She would often tell them:

‘We can go to the hall, we can go to the kitchen, we can dump the scumbag, and we can become rich women. Regardless of whether we women are hardworking or capable, we must treat ourselves better, only pieces of good jadeites are worthy of us.’⁵

The gist of those words resonates deeply with fans, and they seem to understand and see the poignancy behind them. According to Ah Xiang, she can sell 8-9 million yuan (1 million euro) of goods a month. It should not come as a surprise that she has become the breadwinner of the family, while her husband takes care of her three sons at home. The female live streamers will vividly demonstrate the colorful trading scenes, while socializing with the Burmese. On the one hand, the presence of Burmese people convinces fans that the jade purchased by the go-between is the ‘source product’, and it also caters to their yearning for an exotic and magical Myanmar, in both a cost-effective and playful manner. On the other hand, this has led to the emergence of Myanmar performers showcasing their ‘Myanmar’ identity for Chinese buyers. For these Myanmar performers promoting sales for profit is the ultimate goal. Therefore, in front of the live streaming camera, conveying the image of the broadcaster energetically bargaining with the Burmese to help fans get low-priced quality goods is another unique selling point, regardless of whether the Burmese and the transaction scene are real or not, and whether the goods really belong to these Burmese. Some live streamers have even established long-term partnerships with Burmese people.

In short, the communication and selling practices of jadeite female live streamers are trans-local, trans-national and trans-cultural. As a grassroots class, they not only have survived but a handful also thrived in the jadeite live streaming industry, by making huge profits, which makes them stand out. The main reasons for their success are their ability to use social media, develop effective cross-cultural communication skills, and the acumen grounded in the female psychological capital to establish social relationships that transcend the mere financial transaction. Unlike other female entrepreneurs they rely less on their high educational attainment, high-tech mastery or high capital investment. These relationships are anchored in the bonding process between the elite female buyers and non-elite female live streamers. These live streamers entered the jadeite live streaming practice with a cosmopolitan disposition and attitudes of openness, and in so doing becoming a vital link connecting online and offline, Myanmar and China, and in the meantime making good money and for some even a fortune.

FITTING IN: COSMOPOLITAN LIFE ADAPTATION AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

In order to improve business, jadeite female live streamers actively establish close relations with participants from various ethnic groups in Myanmar or all over China. In their everyday lives, they open up to others, learn the Burmese language, respect Burmese culture (food, festivals, religion), and forge local networks with other females, including Burmese women. Their success and adventurous life have attracted more women in their 20s to 40s from all over China to join the jade live broadcasting industry.

‘We met in JieGao Yucheng. He is only 17 years old but so handsome that his debut (to be a star) was quite successful. The fans in my live streaming room are clamoring to watch him every day... It does not matter that he cannot speak Chinese, the fans always asked me to let him speak Burmese. During the live streaming, he doesn’t need to say anything, as long as he shows his face, other Burmese sellers will hand over the goods to him... We have been cooperating for several months, eating together every day and live streaming together. He’s going to be my brother soon!’⁶

5 Interview time: 2021.12; Reporter: CLX; Location: Douyin live streaming base in Duobao City, Ruili City, Dehong Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

6 Interview time: August 2018; Respondent: AL; Location: Jiegao Yucheng, Ruili City, Dehong Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

Similar to this respondent, female jadeite live streamers often establish personal relationships with other ethnic groups outside of business, which is not only beneficial to business, but also conducive to integrating into the local life full of diversity. In interacting with Burmese, they actively learn Burmese or Kachin from each other. Instead of achieving full proficiency, they aspire to learn simple daily expressions and common expressions in jadeite trading. In addition to the traditional festivals of the Han people, they are keen to participate in the Songkran Festival of the cross-border Dai people and the Manau of the Jingpo people and wear each other's traditional costumes. Their residences are usually located around the jadeite market, so they can rest after live streaming until early in the morning. Small vendors of various ethnic groups set up stalls or open shops selling snacks in these areas. Diversified food has also become a part of the female live streamers' everyday life, and it is one of the sources of happiness for them to stay and work in Ruili.

In addition, Jadeite female live streamers also participated in the formation of mutual aid groups to help resolve cross-cultural and cross-ethnic economic disputes, family conflicts, and the living difficulties of the disadvantaged. The border certificates held by Burmese people entering the Ruili border port are only valid for 7 days. In case of extension, they need to queue up at the Chinese customs to get the stamp again. Despite the inconveniences, working in Ruili has more financial benefit than in Myanmar. Coupled with the long-term armed conflict in northern Myanmar, the safe and prosperous Chinese border ports have generated continuous flows of migrants. However, Burmese entering China face a series of cultural problems such as adapting to local economic and social rules. One Kachin female respondent, speaking both Chinese and Burmese, said that Burmese people always suffer and are subject to deception in the jade live streaming business due to language problems. As there is no channel for fair solutions, she co-founded a women's charity organization with three Burmese female friends and volunteered to help resolve economic disputes in the jadeite trade and family conflicts of Burmese immigrants in her spare time. The money raised is used to donate to those 'women who are bullied and unprotected'. For example, some live streamers borrowed goods to live broadcast but did not return them to the Myanmar owners, making it difficult for the latter to even survive. In these cases, the organization will help the owner to file a complaint with the Ruili Myanmar Jewelers Association, while also providing a small sum of money for travel expenses or for living expenses. Some Burmese men go to Ruili to work, and after earning some money, they abandon their wives in Burma to find new lovers. These wives also seek their help. In one case the organization even retraced the husband's new residence to 'seek justice'. When they encounter abandoned Myanmar children or orphans, they would send the children to a Buddhist temple in Muse, the Burmese border town, opposite Ruili; where monks are willing to adopt abandoned children and orphans. As long as women in Ruili, Jiegao, and Muse suffer from unfair treatment, the organization will lend a helping hand, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religious belief. As more and more women have been supported, new women have joined to form a powerful non-profit organization.

However, our investigation and research also found that the female jadeite live streamer's adaptation and recognition in Ruili are not always smooth but often replete with economic, social and/or personal problems. In terms of income, this ranges from the basic salary at around 5,000 yuan (650 euro), to the highest salary of 10,000 yuan (1300 euro), while the remainder of the income is derived from the sales commission. Although the income of broadcasters like Ah Xiang is huge, the overall structure looks like a pyramid. Only the broadcasters at the top can reach this level, while most of them find themselves at the bottom. Their working hours are from 9 am to 2 am, and on the following working day, they have to replay the live broadcast of the day, and they do this every day, with almost no time for a private life or physical rest. Moreover, when doing live streaming for a long time, on a daily basis, some have severely damaged their voices. In order to better interact with fans and encourage them to buy, some live streamers have been in a state of high morale, fanaticism, and anxiety for a long time. Their everyday lives are firmly controlled by a fixed media space-time framework, and these women are therefore thoroughly abused. Some female live

streamers could not continue and left Ruili to seek new opportunities in other parts of the jadeite industry. However this is a tiny and not representative part of the entire group of live streamers.

Conclusion

The cosmopolitan space is often seen as a gathering place for the elite, and this understanding of cosmopolitanism represents a value system and social norms dominated by wealth, and power, and embodied by the higher social class. Ruili displays another kind of a cosmopolitan urban space, one that is located in a border region and deviating from mainstream cosmopolitanism. The Chinese government intends to promote the cosmopolitanism of border port cities from top to bottom through the discourse of 'opening up', and the political strategy of free trade port construction. The construction of a series of port infrastructure and the construction of open rules have attracted grassroots migrants consisting of both diverse ethnic groups from Myanmar and internal migrants from all over China to migrate to Ruili, looking for economic opportunities. The long-established local jadeite industry has also been reconstructed in terms of trading rules and spatial distribution.

At the micro level from the perspective of everyday practices, people who entered Ruili from other places construct everyday cosmopolitanism. Although we need to distinguish between discursive vision and everyday practice, vision and practice are also intricately interconnected. On the one hand, social media technology provides opportunities for women to break through national boundaries and certain social gender status constraints, while the platform provides a space to question and subvert traditional gender and performance norms. Here, they can deploy their so called 'female' capacities and national culture to gain opportunities for upward development. Women's penchant for empathy, communication skills and social skills are fully utilized to stand out in this field. They are no longer objectified consumption symbols in the consumer society, but the controllers of consumption patterns, gaining a leading role in the industry. They generate substantial income, take the initiative, and become the breadwinner in the family. This is made possible by the economic conditions and the opportunities of cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the platform locks these women into a highly rigid everyday rhythm, and as a result of restrictions they become highly vulnerable to exploitation. The everyday cosmopolitan practices and performances of female jadeite live streamers are manifested in the establishment and maintenance of transnational and cross-cultural social relationships due to work needs. Their fundamental purpose is still to gain more economic benefits in order to survive. Therefore, unlike the cosmopolitan vision of the state, cosmopolitanism in everyday practice becomes a tool or strategy for grassroots women to access cosmopolitan resources. In so doing, we argue that they engage in strategic everyday cosmopolitanism, although they might not identify themselves as such.

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