

Why Periodic Markets Are Held: Considering Products, People, and Place in the Yunnan-Vietnam Border Area

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This paper probes the mechanism of present-day periodic markets and how they operate through a detailed case study of periodic markets frequented by different ethnic groups in Jinping county, Yunnan, China. It sets out to identify the defining characteristics of periodic markets and considers the question of why they arise and why they continue to survive today. Past research has demonstrated that a key feature of periodic markets in traditional China was their accessibility and the freedom that they afforded local residents in buying and selling commodities. Fieldwork confirms that six-day-cycle markets, based on the 12-day Chinese zodiac, in Jinping county do give producers of all ethnicities the freedom to sell their produce, but also points out that the market environment encourages the spontaneous specialization of production skills and provides an important place for social interaction and expression of the local cultures.

Keywords: periodic markets, marketplaces, Yunnan, ethnic diversity

I Introduction

Analysis of the nature, function, and role of marketplaces has a long history within the social sciences, and it is widely believed that human society's inclination to exchange is one of its defining characteristics. Contextualizing marketplaces within the history of a region is critical for understanding the local society. In mainland Southeast Asia, an area where markets and trade networks have always been vibrant, creative, and dynamic, there is a renewed interest in how people interact in marketplaces as the region continues its rapid economic development. Recent transformation of national economies towards more liberal models of market-driven growth, along with the integration of economies to

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form a dynamic regional market that includes southern China, brings the focus back to questions of how local people conduct trade. In the contemporary setting, while liberalized markets and freer trade have meant new opportunities for many people, these opportunities are accompanied by significant risks—many of which involve the interface between producers and consumers. While this interface may be undergoing rapid transitions—with increases in access to information and technology, and improving infrastructure—for much of the population living in rural areas the primary access route to larger markets often takes the form of a periodic marketplace.

The influence of Chinese markets and traders on the economic life of people in Southeast Asia has taken on “new” meanings in recent years, as borders are opened and regulations gradually relaxed after a long period of tension. But the economic influence of China is hardly a new phenomenon, and contemporary markets and marketplaces must be understood within their historical context. Japanese scholars began to conduct research on markets in China during the pre-World War II period. Studies by the economic historian of China Kato Shigeshi emphasized the role of periodic markets as a key focal point for economic activities, while the historian of Chinese agriculture Amano Motonosuke and another historian of China Masui Tsuneo also closely examined the role of markets in local society (Kato 1936; Amano 1940; Masui 1941). These studies all assumed that markets played an important role in the maintenance of everyday life of local communities in traditional China. They showed that market spheres had centers that varied considerably in size, from small day-worker markets encompassing just a few villages through to major livestock markets that serviced an entire county. Moreover, these markets intersected and overlapped at various levels. They also pointed out that periodic markets in China provided a highly open and accessible venue for local people to buy and sell goods, operating autonomously without interference from government authorities or specific interest groups.

G. William Skinner, in his study of markets in Sichuan province, expanded on the research of pre-war Japanese scholars. He found markets to be both hierarchically and spatially distributed according to size, and argued that life in Chinese villages was determined by the coverage of the market sphere (1979). Recently, Kuroda Akinobu, an economic historian of Asia, has refuted Skinner’s theory (2003). Focusing on the role of markets in the collection and distribution of goods, Kuroda argues that markets are just one of many different nodes or junctions in the distribution chain, and says that “market spheres” do not exist as economic spaces. He regards markets in traditional China as freely created by individual proprietors as a means of engaging in free and unhindered trade without intervention from the state or regulation by closed groups, in contrast to the model of centralized administration. His idea is very close to that of the pre-war

Japanese scholars.

Western anthropologists have seen marketplaces as a window on the intersection of the economic and social spheres for local people (Michaud and Turner 2000). Central to this overlapping of spheres is the idea of exchange, and in the Southeast Asian context, marketplaces are where people from different communities come together to meet, communicate, and trade. Long-standing traditions of interaction and exchange between upland and lowland people are a strong argument against positing rigid social structures that conceive of upland areas as isolated and monolithic.¹⁾ As will be discussed below, exchange occurs along two important axes—uplander-uplander and uplander-lowlander. Thus, we can conceptualize concurrent forces driving the confirmation of an upland sphere of socio-economic interactions and the linking of these interactions with lowland spheres. As such it is useful to recall again that the “exchange” is often more than a straightforward trade of goods and services for cash.

This paper probes the mechanisms of present-day periodic markets and how they operate, through a case study of periodic markets operating in Jinping county, Yunnan, China. In order to elucidate the issue of why periodic markets arise, this paper sets out to identify the defining characteristics of periodic markets and considers the question of why they continue to survive today. There is an assumption implicit in much of the discussion surrounding rural markets that they are constantly moving towards greater integration with larger urban markets—in other words that they are a vehicle for modernization. This is driven largely by a historical perspective that attributes the consolidation of political power and the subsequent emergence of nation states in Southeast Asia to the expansion of trade networks. There is a counter-argument asserting that local, or traditional trading systems may show surprising resilience in face of it all, demonstrating their relative autonomy (Evers 1988). In fact, Sarah Turner (2010) has described how cross-border traders on the Sino-Vietnamese border continue to avoid the view of the state, asserting their agency locally just as state-centered socio-economic development proceeds all around them. Moreover, the relationship between social diversity and the role of local markets remains a gap in the literature (Pottie-Sherman 2011). This paper is an attempt to step back from this macro-scale analysis to consider the workings of temporary markets in an ethnically diverse mountainous area surrounded by rapid socio-economic change, and consider how and why these marketplaces continue to thrive as they do.

1) See, for example, the special issue of the *Journal of Global History* (2010) responding to James Scott's discussion of Zomia.

II Markets in the Ethno-history of Jinping County

Ethnic Diversity

The Jinping Miao, Yao, and Dai Autonomous County (hereafter referred to as Jinping) of the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture (hereafter referred to as Honghe) is located close to the border with Vietnam, about 250 kilometers south of the Yunnan provincial capital city of Kunming (Fig. 1). It covers an area of 3,686 square kilometers, of which 99.78 percent is occupied by mountains. Towns and villages are strung along the scant flat land available in the river valleys and also located on the mountain ridges where the slopes are not too steep. The county is home to eight ethnic groups (Dai, Hani, Yao, Kucong, Alu, Miao, Zhuang, and Han) and two other groups known as the Habei and the Man, whose ethnic affiliation has not been established yet.



Fig. 1 Survey Region

The lowland Dai live at altitudes ranging from 300 to 500 meters above sea level. Traditionally they have been involved primarily in rice farming, building paddies on flat land in the river valleys, where they cultivate two crops per year. More recently, the Dai have begun specializing in cash crops such as bananas and Para rubber. The Miao, Hani, Alu, Yao, and Kucong, meanwhile, are upland peoples who live at altitudes of 800 to 1,300 meters, on sloping land and along the mountain ridges. In the past they have grown rice on terraced rice paddies, but in recent years they have started to cultivate other crops, such as cassava, maize, vegetables, and lemon grass, on the slopes. Traditional slash-and-burn farming as well as hunting and gathering practices are now prohibited by the government. Thus, Jinping represents an area where a multitude of ethnic groups reside in a complex topography of river valleys surrounded by mountains.

Markets as a Form of Inter-ethnic Negotiation

The form and role of markets in the history of rural China has received significant attention in the literature. Periodic markets are said to have been the predominant form of markets, so it is not surprising that the determination of market days has been a prime issue of interest. In this paper we are interested in the question of how periodic markets are managed in an area of high cultural diversity, where there are several vernacular calendars employed in different areas.

There are Chinese language references to periodic markets in Yunnan from the Yuan dynasty, and these increased in detail in the Ming dynasty. For example, a record from the fifteenth century notes that periodic markets were held on days containing the number seven in Puning, east of Lake Dian. This same reference also mentions markets being held at 3-, 5- and 10-day intervals, as well as areas that set market days according to the 12-day Chinese zodiac. Thus, by the Ming period there were at least three common patterns for establishing market days. It is difficult to establish exactly when periodic markets were first held in the current study area, but according to the *Jinping Xianzhi* (Jinping County Gazetteer), by the end of the Qing period, markets were held in nine places, including Mengla, Zhemi, and Dingqing, at a six-day interval according to the Chinese zodiac. A report from 1934 (Yunnansheng Jinping Maiozu Yaozu Daizu Zizhixian Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 1994) mentions there were still no fixed markets, and that local periodic markets were small, not usually exceeding 200–300 people. Bartering was the main mode of exchange in these markets. Lüchun county, which borders on Jinping, has also typically used the Chinese zodiac to determine market days.

The predominance of the Chinese zodiac to fix the date for periodic markets in the study area is noteworthy. The ethnic diversity of Yunnan means that as a rule several

different calendars have been in operation across the mountainous areas. For example, the Dai calendar divides a year into 12 months of 30 and 29 days, including a month in which extra days are added to adjust to their 354-day year. The Yi have a 360-day year, which they divide into 18 months, each of 20 days, while the 360-day Hani year is divided into 12 months. In an area like this, the use of the Chinese zodiac, which is not related to the reckoning of monthly cycles, allows the groups to operate on their own calendar while maintaining a common system for determining market dates. Because of the importance of these markets, it is essential that a shared reckoning be possible across the many cultures present in the region. It could be argued that without this system, periodic markets in this area of difficult transport and communications would not have been possible.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the fate of markets has been heavily influenced by the political currents of the times. In Jinping there were 14 markets in 1952, but the number increased to 19 in 1956 with the policy on free markets in liberated areas (Yunnansheng Yuanyang Xianzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 1988). However, in 1958, the Great Leap Forward stimulated the formation of cooperatives and free markets were abolished. In the early 1960s, with the national economy on the brink of collapse, the prohibition on free markets was reversed and 19 markets reappeared in Jinping. However, the Cultural Revolution years (1966–76) saw yet another swing away from free markets, with a standard “Sunday market” being imposed. Finally, in the 1980s, with the relaxation of policy controls on agricultural production, six-day rotation markets were restored and the flow of goods in the mountainous areas improved greatly.

Use of the Chinese zodiac to determine market days has been a key factor allowing diverse ethnic groups to establish and maintain the periodic markets. This system of reckoning has proven remarkably resilient in the years after 1949, when policy changed frequently and often severely limited farmers' ability to engage in free transactions.

III Structure of Periodic Markets

Market Days and Their Locations

Lowland and upland peoples meet at periodic markets which are held every six days at towns along the main highway passing through Jinping county. At these markets, upland farmers buy and sell among themselves, in addition to engaging in transactions with lowland traders. The data used in this paper was collected from fieldwork conducted at

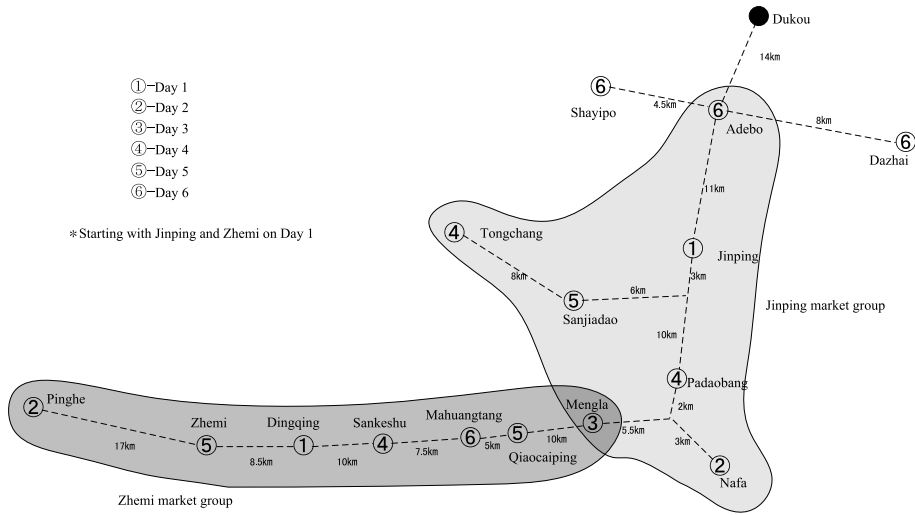


Fig. 2 Market Days in Jinping Prefecture

these markets between 2003 and 2006.²⁾

Eighteen markets lie on the road from Dukou to Zhemi and the surrounding areas within Jinping county. Dukou holds a market every Sunday, while markets in other towns are held once every six days. Market days are fixed according to the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac instead of the solar calendar. Here markets are held every six days on the day of the Rat and the day of the Horse. Markets based on the 12-animal system are known to have been held in neighboring Lüchun and Yuanyang counties during the late Qing period. Use of the Chinese zodiac is common among many upland groups in this region. It is interesting to note that periodic markets where non-timber forest products are traded in the upland areas of Laos are held according to a 10-day calendar used by the Khmu (Yokoyama 2010).

Starting at Jinjing on Day 1, the markets are held along the main highway in the following sequence: Nafa on Day 2, Mengla on Day 3, Padaobang and Tongchang on Day 4 (as both are very small markets, the merchants split up on this day), Sanjiadao on Day 5, and Adebao on Day 6 (Fig. 2). Adebao and Mengla lie about 30 kilometers apart in a

2) Field surveys of the periodic markets in Jinping county were conducted with support from a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (Basic B15401037, FY2003–FY2006, “Ethno-science in Reality and Sustainability of Environmental Usage: Slash-and-Burn Farming Practices in Modern China,” head Shinohara Toru). Seven studies were conducted: March 11–19, 2003; August 25–September 12, 2003; November 5–December 25, 2003; May 18–June 15, 2004; November 15–22, 2004; July 11–September 15, 2005; and January 23–February 24, 2006.

straight line, and market days are arranged to ensure that they do not open on the same day. This set has been named the Jinping market group.

Another market group, the Zhemi group, starts at Dingqing on Day 1 and moves in sequence to Pinghe, Mengla, Sankeshu, Zhemi, and finally Mahuangtang. Zhemi and Mengla are about 40 kilometers apart. The days of the markets held at the towns in between, namely Dingqing, Sankeshu, Mahuangtang, and Pinghe are organized so that they do not clash. The market at Mengla is also included in the Jinping market group, and the Pinghe market is located in Lüchun county, west of Jinping county. Thus it is clear that this market system is not confined to administrative boundaries. There are markets along the road going southwest of Pinghe, at Apu, Xingsai, and Banpo. The Apu and Banpo markets are held every 12 days rather than every 6 days. The market at Qiaocaiping is currently not operating, although it is part of the Zhemi group.

Villagers access the markets by two methods. The first is by walking. The Alu people from villages north of Zhemi, for instance, carry their vegetables on foot along the mountain roads, a journey of three to four hours each way, within a radius of about eight kilometers around Zhemi. The second method is to get rides on vehicles traveling along the road. Vehicle transportation allows people from villages located up to about 20 kilometers either side (east and west) of Zhemi to attend the market, thus extending the range of access. There are many Kucong villages scattered on the mountains south of Zhemi, and those within eight kilometers of Zhemi travel to the market there. Therefore the Zhemi market serves as a focal point that draws local people from all directions, either down the mountain roads, or along the main highway, but most villagers travel to the market on foot.

Next, let us consider the distance between towns that have markets. The second market in the Zhemi group is at Pinghe, which is 17 kilometers from Zhemi. Dingqing is 8.5 kilometers from Zhemi and 10 kilometers from Sankeshu. Sankeshu is 7.5 kilometers from Mahuangtang, which in turn lies 15 kilometers from Mengla. The average distance between towns that have markets is 10.5 kilometers. If we draw circles with a radius of eight kilometers on a map that shows Zhemi, Dingqing, and Sankeshu, we see from the overlap of the circles that virtually all of the villages in the Zhemi valley fall within at least one of the circles. Thus, markets in the six-day cycle are spaced at relatively fixed intervals along the main highway and are positioned within walking distance of all the surrounding villages.

Outdoor Stalls versus Permanent Structures

Outdoor stalls at the markets can be classified into three patterns. The first pattern occurs at Zhemi and Mahuangtang. At Zhemi, the stalls are clustered into groups, start-

ing with livestock stalls near the intersection with the main highway, then fruit and vegetable, and meat and fish stalls on the side street, miscellaneous goods for a 200-meter stretch along the major thoroughfare, and clothing along another 100 meters on the major thoroughfare (Fig. 3). Likewise at Mahuangtang, the stalls are grouped with fruit and vegetables first (near the main highway), followed by meat and fish, miscellaneous goods, foodstuffs, and clothing on the side street. In this pattern, food stalls dealing in products such as meat and fish, and fruit and vegetables are concentrated in the area near the main highway.

The second pattern can be observed at Dingqing and Pinghe. At Dingqing, meat and fish stalls are clustered near the main highway, with miscellaneous goods coming next, followed by fruit and vegetables (Fig. 4). The Pinghe market has two sections: parallel to the main highway there is the eastern market road with fruit and livestock and the western market road with food and miscellaneous goods. Further north there is an open area which has cooked food and clothing stalls on the western side and pork stalls at the far western end. In this pattern, meat and fish stalls are separated from those vending fruit and vegetables.

The third pattern is found at Sankeshu, where the market begins with miscellaneous goods and clothing near the main highway, followed by fruit and vegetables, then meat and fish (Fig. 5). Here, stalls vending meat and fish, and fruit and vegetables, rather than being closest to the market entrance, are situated the furthest away.

With the exception of the third pattern, it can be seen that food stalls, particularly meat and fish, and fruit and vegetables, are generally concentrated at the entrance of the market near the main highway, where the largest number of people congregate. Regardless of some minor variations, we can say that the grouping of stalls according to commodity categories is a feature common to all periodic markets.

Next, let us examine the correlation between attendance at a market and the number and type of outdoor stalls and permanent shops. Zhemi has the largest number of outdoor stalls at 293, followed by Pinghe (228), Sankeshu (146), Mahuangtang (94), and Dingqing (93). Zhemi also has the highest attendance at peak periods (around 1,200 people), followed by Sankeshu (587), Mahuangtang (386), and Dingqing (194). These figures equate to 4.1 visitors per stall at Zhemi, 4.0 at Sankeshu, 4.1 at Mahuangtang, and 2.1 at Dingqing. Apart from Dingqing, the data indicates an average of around four visitors per stall at peak times, suggesting a strong correlation between the overall attendance and the number of stalls.

Zhemi once again has the greatest number of permanent shops (80), followed by Dingqing and Mahuangtang (10 each), and Sankeshu (7). Permanent eating establishments are present at every market. Zhemi has many more permanent shops than other

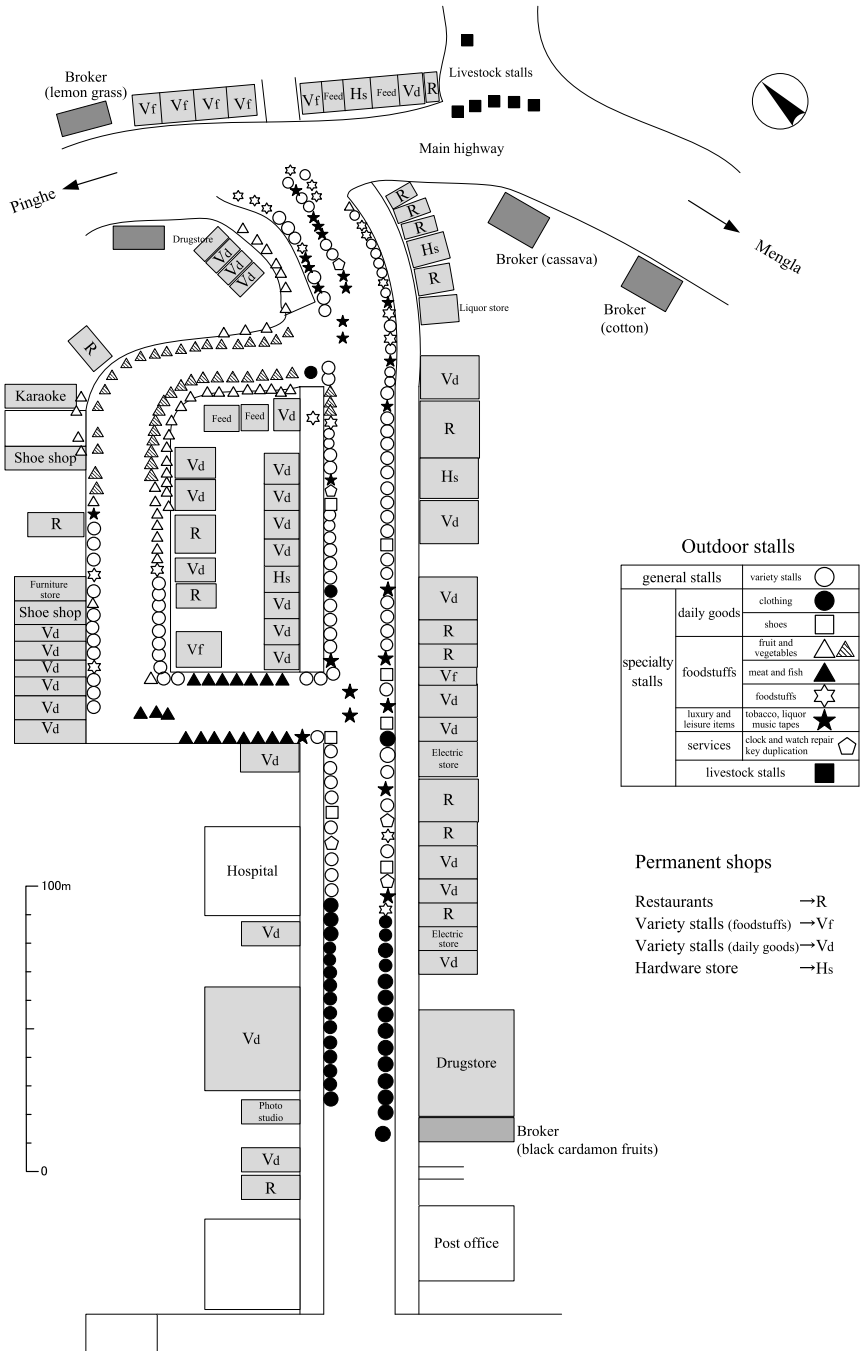


Fig. 3 Periodic Market at Zhemu

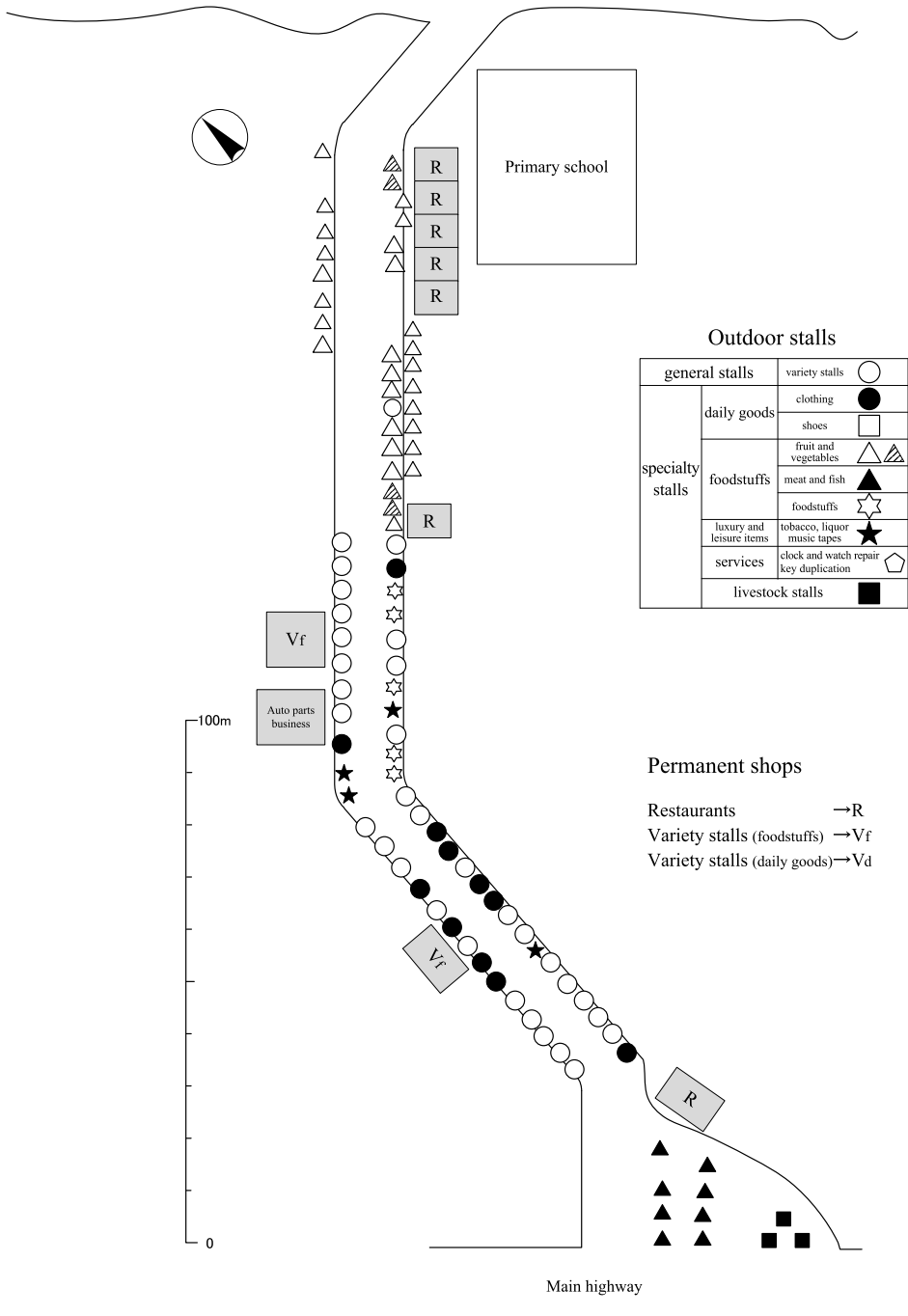


Fig. 4 Periodic Market at Dingqing

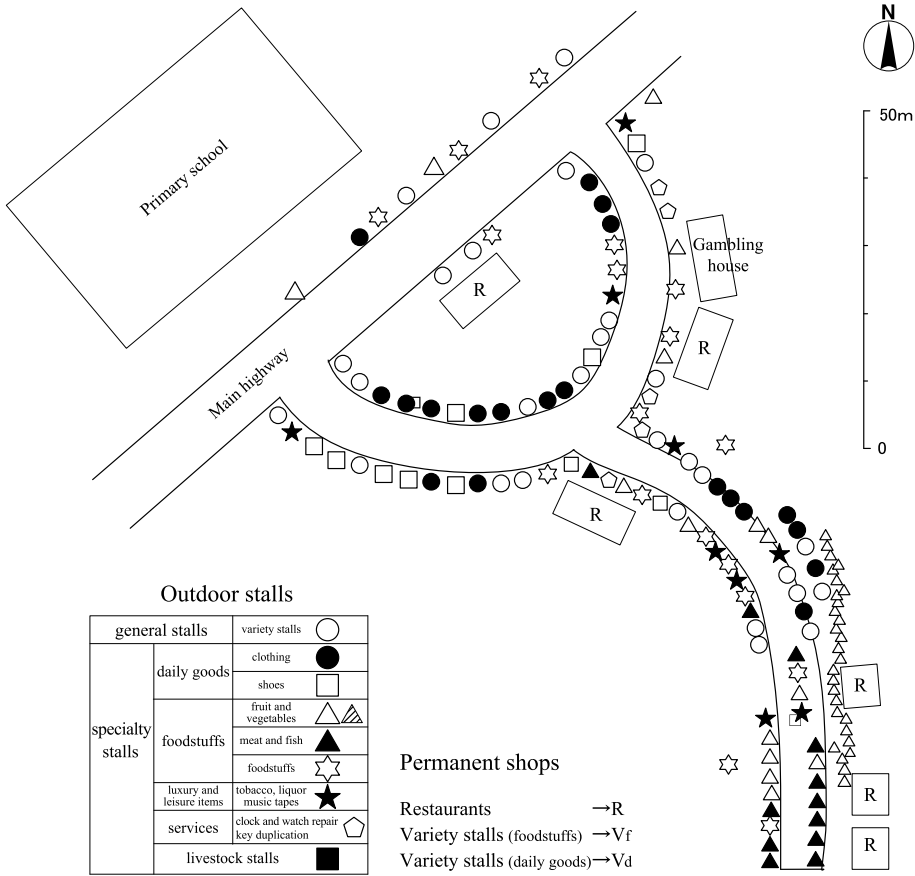


Fig. 5 Periodic Market at Sankeshu

towns with markets. Many of these are run by brokers who deal in valuable cash crops such as black cardamom (*Amomum tsao-ko* Crevost *et* Lem.), cotton, cassava, and lemon grass. Mahuangtang has only one broker who buys cassava, while Sankeshu and Dingqing have none. Thus, Zhemi is more heavily involved than other markets in purchasing cash crops.

Outdoor stalls can be broadly classified into two groups: specialty stalls that trade in commodities of a particular category or provide specific services, and general stalls. Specialty stalls can be further divided into five categories: daily goods, foodstuffs, leisure items, clothing, and services. All the markets have specialty and general stalls that sell clothing, fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, cooking ingredients such as bean curd, tobacco, liquor, and leisure items (music tapes, CDs, and VCDs). Stalls vending foodstuffs account for nearly half of the total (45–50 percent), which indicates the importance of

food as a commodity, regardless of the size or type of market.

Many of the markets do not provide a full range of commodities and services. The types of permanent shops and outdoor stalls at a market will vary depending on the number of people who assemble. The market at Zhemi is both the largest in size and the most comprehensive in terms of the range of commodities and services on offer. A ratio of around four customers per outdoor stall at peak times is thought to be the result of vendors adjusting the number of outdoor stalls to match customer numbers, which as noted earlier, are inherently limited at each market.

Regulation of periodic markets is done by the commerce office of the local government. Tax is levied according to the space used by vendors—floor-space vendors pay RMB 2 per day, collected on each market day; table vendors and suspended shelf vendors pay RMB 30 quarterly in addition to RMB 3 per day at the market. The fees cover sanitation and security.

Periodic Markets as Seen from Types of Vegetables Vended

In order to ascertain the market characteristics from the types of vegetables sold at different times, let us consider the vegetables on offer at the market in Zhemi during the rainy season (May and June) and the dry season (October and November). Fieldwork conducted during the rainy season revealed that 38 different types of vegetables were vended at markets in Zhemi. In order of importance, they were Chinese leeks, followed by chillies, kidney beans, onions, eggplants, potatoes, and cucumbers. Vendors at Sankeshu offered 20 types of vegetables during the rainy season. Here the most common vegetables were cucumbers, followed by chillies, kidney beans, various leafy greens, pumpkins, eggplants, potatoes, and Chinese cabbage. The Dingqing market had 27 types of vegetable in the rainy season, with Chinese leeks being most popular.

Vegetables vended at Pinghe during the dry season were chillies, followed by various leafy greens, bean sprouts, ginger, *dokudami* (*Houttuynia cordata* Thunb.), onions, Chinese leeks, and buckwheat leaves, in order of popularity. Mahuangtang offered 27 types of vegetables during the dry season, with Chinese cabbage topping the list. Vendors at Zhemi sold 51 different types of vegetables during the dry season.

Next, we shall consider the relationship between buyers and sellers of vegetables. As mentioned above, Zhemi is home to at least eight different ethnic groups, who are distributed unevenly throughout the valley. Hani are numerous around Pinghe in Lüchun county to the west, while Kucong mostly live around Zhemi and Dingqing in the mountains to the south. Many Alu and Hani people dwell in the mountains to the north. Miao are concentrated in the nearby mountains which stretch from Sankeshu to Mengla, while Dai and Zhuang live on the Pinghe plains.

The overwhelming majority of the vegetable stalls at Pinghe is run by Hani (83 percent), with Han (16 percent) featuring as the only other significant ethnic group. At the Zhemi market on November 15, 2003, Dai ran nearly all of the fruit stalls (94 percent), while Alu (71 percent) dominated the vegetable stalls, with Dai (24 percent), Yao (3 percent), and Han (2 percent) following far behind. At the Zhemi market a year later on June 6, 2004, Dai vendors ran all the fruit stalls, while vegetable vending was shared by Alu (54 percent), Dai (35 percent), and Kucong (11 percent). While the numbers for Alu and Dai vendors were similar to those observed the previous November, it was interesting to note the appearance of Kucong vendors as they had been absent the year before.

Hani (43 percent of the stalls) were the most common vendors at the Dingqing market, followed by Dai (13 percent), Alu (7 percent), and Yao (6 percent). Miao vendors (82 percent) dominated vegetable stalls at Sankeshu, with Hani and Miao together accounting for a mere 6 percent.

This data indicates that the ethnic breakdown of stall operators in each market reflects the ethnic composition of the local area, and that markets provide villagers with opportunities not only to purchase their daily necessities, but also to sell produce such as vegetables.

Let us examine the commercial behavior of villagers who visit the markets to sell their vegetables. For the purpose of analysis, we shall look at attendance numbers at the Zhemi market and the commercial behavior of Alu at that market. An hourly analysis of crowd figures indicates that people start arriving at the market from around eight o'clock in the morning. Visitor numbers grow steadily and peak at 11 o'clock, declining thereafter until about 2 o'clock, when the market essentially finishes.

About one-third of the stalls at the Dingqing, Sankeshu, Mahuangtang, and Pinghe markets sell fruit and vegetables. The vendors are generally from ethnic groups living in the surrounding areas. The trading pattern is similar to that observed at Zhemi: vendors sell fruit and vegetables for income, which they then use to purchase daily necessities before returning home in the afternoon. In this way, the market functions as a site for conducting small trade which enables local ethnic peoples to convert their produce into cash. Furthermore, periodic markets are differentiated by the types of vegetables and other commodities vended.

IV Key Requirements of a Periodic Market

Conversion of Produce into Cash for the Purchase of Daily Necessities

The primary role of periodic markets is to provide villagers from the surrounding areas

with an opportunity to sell their vegetables and other produce in order to obtain cash for the purchase of basic daily necessities. The markets represent an important and reliable venue for trading by local villagers, and this fact allows us to conclude that the most important role of the periodic market is as a place to generate cash for the purchase of daily necessities. This characteristic has been pointed out in the aforementioned pre-war Japanese studies of Chinese markets, and also constitutes a universal truth that applies to periodic markets all over the world.³⁾ Villagers seek to gain profit at periodic markets by offering different agricultural produce; to this end, they constantly have to devise livelihood strategies different from those of other producers.

Location within Walking Distance

Markets in the six-day cycle are spaced at regular intervals along the main highway, an arrangement which is designed to compensate for the lack of transportation in the Zhemi valley. Due to the complex topography of river valleys surrounded by mountains, markets must be located within eight kilometers of villages, a distance of three to four hours of walking one way, which allows villagers to return home on the same day. As noted earlier, virtually all of the villages in the Zhemi valley fall within at least one of the overlapping circles with an eight-kilometer radius drawn around the periodic markets at Zhemi, Dingqing, and Sankeshu. Therefore, we may say that the second key requirement of a market is location within walking distance.

3) Based on studies of markets in Shandong and Henan provinces during the 1930s, Amano Motonosuke claims that “farmers lived and worked within a radius of approximately six kilometers centered around markets. Their limited scale of production and/or consumption is too small to warrant moving out of this economic sphere to deal directly with larger trading centers. Given their size, it is not worth the time or cost involved in transporting any surplus produce out of the region. They can manage little more than to take their goods to markets within walking distance and sell their produce there in exchange for the goods they need” (1953).

B. Malinowski and J. de la Fuente describe the market in functional terms as a place where “many people can bring their produce on a weekly basis and sell it to obtain income. For producers, the market represents their best source of purchasing power and a place to obtain profit. The market is like a bank that is always nearby and always accessible” (1987).

Ishihara Hiroshi has studied markets in the context of world history. He claims that “vendors at regular markets are mainly dedicated small-scale farmers and vendors doubling as traders, as well as craftsmen, based on reports from around the world. Purchasers, based on examples from around the world, are mostly small-scale farmers, with the exception of traders who bring in goods from other regions. A significant proportion of purchasers come to markets both for selling and purchasing” (1987).

The first requirement of the market—converting produce to cash for purchasing daily necessities—can be seen as a universal principle that applies to regular markets around the world, not just to those in Jinping county and traditional China.

Traveling Traders and the Market Network

Access to multiple markets is extremely important for traders who exclusively run outdoor stalls. Of the 321 categories of commodities sold at the periodic market at Zhemi, 43 categories (including vegetables, pork, and fish) were produced and consumed within the Zhemi valley. Most of the vegetables vended at the Zhemi market on November 15, 2004, were grown by Alu people on their own land. The remaining 278 categories of commodities (equivalent to 87 percent) came from outside the Zhemi valley area. Traveling traders bring in commodities not produced in the valley in order to profit from the price differential. The vast majority of these traders are ethnic Han Chinese.

Traders travel to periodic markets each time they are held. Having a market at the foot of the mountain provides a convenient way for villagers to sell agricultural produce and obtain manufactured goods that are not produced in the valley. The six-day market cycle allows traveling traders to rotate around several different markets, thus ensuring that they are able to satisfy the demands of villagers throughout the whole valley. For them to be able to do this, markets must be held at places accessible to traders. Therefore, we can conclude that periodic markets form at intersections of vertical and horizontal transportation—that is, at points that connect vertical conveyance of local produce up and down mountain sides with horizontal transportation of manufactured goods from outside and along the valley floors by traveling traders.

The six-day cycle ensures that market days along the highway do not overlap. This makes it possible for both traveling traders and villagers to access multiple markets. Outdoor stall traders do not obtain fresh fruit and vegetables and miscellaneous everyday items for sale at periodic markets direct from major cities such as Kunming, but rather from closer towns, such as Jinping and Mengla, to which these commodities circulate through the market network. The market network stretches all the way from Dukou at the northern tip of Jinping county to Pinghe in Lüchun county along the main highway, as if linked together in a chain. Traveling traders do not live dispersed in all the different towns and villages. Instead, they form groups which are based in towns like Jinping, Mengla, and Zhemi. The traders attend markets held on days that do not clash, moving their stalls from one market to the next. In other words, traveling traders utilize the variation in market days to their own advantage.

The mobility of the traders helps to boost the number of stalls and the range of commodities on offer, which in turn enlarges the scale of the market by attracting more people. While periodic markets function first and foremost as a place for local villagers to trade their produce, traveling traders also play an important role in them. Thus, the third key requirement of a periodic market is the existence of a marketing network and traveling traders who service it.

Brokers and Cash Crops

Nearly all the Miao people around Mahuangtang cultivate cassava in their gardens. Simply by selling some cassava at market mornings, they can earn good money for purchasing other goods. The cassava is not consumed in the Zhemi valley, but is transported by brokers to factories outside Jinping county and processed into starch.

For example, a broker at the Zhemi market purchases cassava in bulk along with other important cash crops from the valley such as black cardamom, lemon grass, and cotton. This gives villagers another option apart from selling small quantities of cassava at their vegetable stalls: they can also sell larger quantities directly to a broker. Zhemi has the greatest number of brokers dealing in cash crops, and consequently attracts the largest number of villagers in the valley. In this way, some markets play a bigger role than others in allowing villagers to dispose of cash crops on a regular basis. The presence of traders such as brokers dealing in cash crops who are connected with the outside market network constitutes the fourth requirement of a periodic market.

Assembly of Small Traders, Diversity of Choice, and Greater Commodity Range

The characteristics that distinguish the various markets in the six-day cycle are more than just differences in the types of fruits and vegetables offered. All the markets do not provide the same range of commodities and services, so villagers may choose which one to attend in accordance with their particular needs. Normally they will make use of several different markets rather than restrict themselves to just one.

At first glance, market stalls appear to sell a similar range of goods in each category. Of the 321 different commodity categories on offer at the Zhemi market on November 15, 2003, 37 percent were available at only one stall, another 18 percent were available at only two stalls, 9 percent were available at only three stalls, and 5 percent were available at only four stalls. Thus, more than half of the 321 commodities on offer could only be purchased from one or two stalls at the market. The number of different commodities available at any given stall, meanwhile, ranged from 6 to 15. Thus, the stalls generally offer a fairly limited range of goods. However, this is precisely what enables them to differentiate themselves from others selling different types of goods.

The market brings together stalls vending the same categories of goods because having a large number of stalls makes up for the fact that most stalls are small and only stock a limited range of commodities. The stalls can differentiate themselves by selling specific types of goods, while the market as a whole can provide a wide range of goods by bringing together the various types of stalls. Thus, the market provides diversity of choice and a larger range of commodities by bringing together a variety of small traders.

V Discussion: The Level of Freedom in Periodic Markets

Writing about the trans-Mekong trade in northern Laos and northern Thailand, Andrew Walker (1999) has suggested that the dichotomy between regulation and liberalization does not hold when looking into the micro-level dynamics of local trade networks. He challenges the common assumption that the past was a period of regulation, while the present and future are heading towards liberalization. It could be argued that his conclusion that the current situation is one of interwoven practices of regulation and liberalization, drawn from analysis of border trade, can be applied to smaller marketplaces. While the states of the region seem to be moving towards more liberalized market-driven economies, improved road access and information technology extend the possibility of state encroachment into local matters.

Past research has demonstrated that a key feature of periodic markets in traditional China was their accessibility and the freedom that they afforded local residents in buying and selling commodities. Can these features be found in the markets in Jinping county? Fruit and vegetable stalls at Zhemi market were the exclusive domain of Alu and Dai during the dry season, but Kucong vegetable vendors joined them during the wet season. At Nafa, meanwhile, some stalls were manned by traders from Vietnam who crossed over into China to attend the market. At markets in Jinping county, stallholders are free to sell whatever they like once they have paid the required fees. Thus, markets in the Zhemi valley are not monopolized by goods sold by specific organizations or particular ethnic groups. Anyone can sell their products at periodic markets provided that they can produce commodities of saleable value and pay the charges levied by the local government.

The openness and freedom of markets in Jinping county exerts a strong influence on commercial relations among ethnic groups. Producing items such as indigo dyed clothing and baskets for carrying loads on the back, for instance, involves several different ethnic groups. In the case of dyed clothing, Hani, Yao, and Dai peoples each contribute specialized skills to tasks such as making thread from cotton, spinning thread into cloth, and dyeing cloth. No one trader takes responsibility for the overall production process. It is the market environment that makes this form of specialization possible, in particular the situation which permits participation by anyone and allows vendors to bring in goods that help them to differentiate themselves from others. The market enables any producer to sell their produce, and encourages spontaneous specialization of tasks within the production process. Periodic markets in Jinping therefore fulfill an important role in ensuring producers the freedom to sell their produce while at the same time encouraging specialization of production skills.

Spontaneous specialization of manufacturing and processing tasks come about not because different ethnic groups are inherently skilled at particular tasks, but because by bringing different peoples together the market environment encourages better understanding and awareness of different skills and abilities. In other words, the market encourages natural specialization through better awareness of differences. This function of the market helps to differentiate production processes and also boosts awareness among the various groups of their own ethnic uniqueness. By doing so it contributes to the creation and recreation of cultural identities.

The freedom afforded by the market environment can be seen as related to the steady increase in the number of markets in Jinping county. In 1989 there was only one periodic market in the Zhemi valley, the one held at Zhemi itself; today there are six. There can be no doubt that this is due to the fact that Jinping is a remote outlying region of Yunnan province where “transport is inconvenient.” Even within this context, periodic markets may be considered relatively free and unregulated, and suited to conditions in the area. The revival of the periodic market can be traced to the introduction of production subcontracting in the early 1980s, which effectively removed much of the regulation on the economic activities of villagers and traders.

It is also interesting to note that in other places, this freedom has taken the form of “freedom to disengage” when the participants perceive that the space of exchange has ceased to serve its purpose. In the market of Sa Pa, in northern Vietnam, where ethnic Vietnamese traders have come to monopolize the most profitable areas of trade, the uplanders have refused to compete in what they see as a losing battle (Michaud and Turner 2000). These findings support the assertion that for upland people marketplaces are about more than economic transactions. This also reconfirms the importance of the finding in Jinping that no particular group or product dominates the market, and may be a significant explanation for the resilience of these markets. Importantly, the “divide” between upland and lowland is crossed with regularity and ease. In fact, it could be suggested that the lack of upland and lowland tension in the periodic markets is one of their most important characteristics.

Traveling merchants from the lowlands, primarily ethnic Han Chinese, and upland producers and sellers are able to ensure that the periodic market days do not overlap through the use of a shared calendar. From the uplanders’ point of view, this calendar is a useful bridge between cultural differences that might otherwise confuse the functioning of the market. At the same time, the market provides space for economically defined niche products, display and trade in traditional handicrafts, and an important place for social life outside the village. As mentioned by Kuroda (2003), there are many non-economic aspects of life that are visible at markets. In Jinping, the coming together of

diverse peoples at periodic markets is an opportunity to renew relationships, enjoy special foods, and exchange information. The marketplace as an arena of social interaction is often overlooked by research that is preoccupied with their economic functions. This is probably even more so in the current period of rapid socio-economic transition, and further detail of the dynamic interactions at markets in areas such as Jinping may provide valuable information on how local communities adapt to the social transformations that are sweeping the region.

VI Conclusion

The periodic markets of Jinping enjoy continued popularity and are an important pillar in the local economy. The previous analysis has emphasized how autonomy of the local economy—by which we mean the freedom, flexibility, and dynamism of the periodic markets—has encouraged its growth. Located in a border region at the forefront of regional economic integration, these marketplaces accommodate both traditional and cash crops, catering to a wide selection of consumers. The periodic markets function with a high degree of spatial fluidity, and are sustained by the flow of products facilitated by the diverse range of actors involved in the operation of the marketplaces. The cultural diversity that characterizes the markets is facilitated by the shared use of the Chinese zodiac to determine market days among groups using different calendars and, at the same time, allow the traveling merchants to avoid overlap in the multiple markets. This paper has suggested that these marketplaces are important in ethnically diverse areas as they enable interaction between people, encourage specialization and development of niche products, and contribute to the complex fabric of social life that characterizes the upland areas. They also suggest the existence of local strategies for negotiating increasingly complex currents of regulation and liberalization. That these markets operate on a regional scale, based on decentralized interactions between diverse actors, attests to social mechanisms that thrive on diversity and are not hindered by the perceived upland-lowland divide.

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