Notes on Transliteration

Interviews in this book were conducted in Mandarin Chinese or English. Although I am not a linguist, I want to emphasize that in writing about the Tai people in China, one is faced with several choices in terms of transliteration. Just as there is neocolonial slippage between “Sipsongpanna,” the current word used by the Tais of that place, and the Mandarin transliteration of Xishuangbanna (or in the local vernacular, just “Banna”), there are also two different linguistic terms for the same ethnic population, “Tai-Lüe” and “Dai-le.” In referring to the Tai, I use “Dai” only when it is used in official Mandarin place names, and “Tai” or “Tai-Lüe” in all other cases.

I rely on pseudonyms for the majority of informants, and in cases requiring confidentiality, I have disguised identities and added characteristics that would make it difficult to identify persons. To further protect informants’ identities, I have given them only one name instead of the usual two metonyms used to denote respect in China. In addition, some of the descriptions of persons are composites. I found these measures were crucial given the sensitivity of HIV/AIDS as a topic of inquiry and the legal issues involved in working with people who are ostensibly outside the law and thus potentially subject to prosecution. In the few cases where proper names are common knowledge and thus already published in newspapers, medical journals, government reports, or conference proceedings, I use people’s given names.

All references to the Chinese yuan refer to the exchange rate of 1 U.S. dollar = 8.3 yuan (the average rate from 1997 to 2002).