

DU, Shanshan. *"Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs": Gender Unity and Gender Equality among the Lahu of Southwest China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. xvii + 237 pages. Illustrations, maps, figures, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$49.50/£35.50; ISBN 0-231-11956-9. Paper US\$22.50/£15.00; ISBN 0-231-11957-7.

This book is delightfully readable and at the same time thought-provoking, full of lively and sensitive ethnography. Focusing on the issue of gender equality, the book is based on a total of eighteen months of fieldwork in Lancang Province in 1987, and 1995 to 1996 in Southwestern China with Lahu people. The first fieldwork was carried out while the author was a student at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences in China, and the latter as her dissertation fieldwork while at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Currently, she is a faculty member of Tulane University.

Lancang Lahu Autonomous County, within Simao Prefecture of Yunnan Province, lies to the west of Lancang River bordering on Myanmar. Long-term anthropological fieldwork in this region has been difficult for outsiders: all the more reason to appreciate this book. Readers will also appreciate the author's effort to "avoid jargon and dense theoretical discussion that could form an obstacle for interdisciplinary and general readers" (24). This, I think is good strategy in that the book successfully sustains the interest of both younger students interested in gender studies but not knowledgeable of the region, as well as scholars interested in the region but lacking reading experience on gender studies. Indeed, the book will interest not only those interested in anthropology and gender, or feminists, but also readers interested in the mountainous areas from Mainland Southeast Asia to Southwest China. Although the reviewer is not sufficiently familiar with the Chinese-language literature on the minority population in this region, considering the fact that there are not many good monographs with special attention on gender issues, even those concerning Mainland Southeast Asia and the expanding literature on the minorities of Southwest China, this book is a valuable contribution to studies of the wider region.

The book consists of six chapters divided into three parts, with an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, the author first discusses how feminist studies have failed to recognize gender-egalitarian societies because they have been hindered by utopian ideals. She defines a gender-egalitarian society as "one whose dominant ideology, institutions, and social practices value its male and female members equally, regardless of the roles they play" (9). She then introduces the people, the field-site, and the fieldwork.

Part I ("Mythology and Ideology") deals with the ideology of gender unity exemplified in the creation myth that emphasizes the female-male dyad (Chapter 1), and in the evolving status of husband-wife dyads during the life-cycle after marriage up to afterlife (Chapter 2). The discussion demonstrates the symbolic elaboration of gender unity in traditional Lahu perceptions. In myths, rituals, classifications, and language, dyads are prevalent, the quintessential dyad being husband/wife, which constitutes joint social status throughout the life cycle so that responsibility, authority, and prestige of men and women are intrinsically intertwined in the dyad.

Part II ("Joint Gender Roles") deals with gender roles in daily activities around the household (Chapter 3), and in village leadership (Chapter 4). In the entire process from pregnancy, childbirth, to raising a family, the wife-husband pair work together and there is very little gendered division of labor. In leadership also, households are represented by the head-couple, and, up until 1949, village heads were also selected and acknowledged as a husband-wife pair in co-leadership. Leadership based on existing gender ideology, however, came in conflict with externally imposed patriarchy in the 1940s. The Guomindang regime imposed

its administrative control by appointing officials locally. Collectivization during the Maoist era completely dismantled the existing system and eliminated the authority of household heads altogether. After the relaxation of state policies in the 1980s, some of the village organization was revived. Yet there is increasing gap from the ideals and practices of gender-unified leadership in the interaction between traditional Lahu leadership and the local cadres, and the female part of the leadership had become invisible to the extent that the author herself did not recognize it in her earlier fieldwork in 1987.

Part III ("Structure and Antistructure") discusses dyadic principles underlying social structure (Chapter 5) where the bilateral principle of kinship networks between household head couples regulate inter-household reciprocity. In discussing the organization of kinship, the author introduces the notion of "dyadic ego" and examines how relationships are manifested in cooperation and interaction among households. Gendered hierarchy within the structure is eliminated by taking the husband-wife dyad as a unitary entity. There are, however, gaps between ideal and practice, especially in cases of dysfunctional marriage (Chapter 6), due to individual failures, parental intervention in choosing marriage partners, or extramarital relations, which the author claims increased drastically during the collectivization program. Divorce, elopement, and love-pact suicides have been the conspicuous responses to such situations. The author locates the source of such dysfunctions both in indigenous socio-cultural factors as well as in the radical imposed social changes, although the emphasis is on the latter.

In conclusion, after attempting some causal and historical explanation of the emphasis on gender unity and equality among the Lahu, the author points out that in the Lahu case, gender equality is a by-product of unity of the dyads, which is a notion that goes against the individualism at the root of liberal feminism, even though on the surface they are similar in the attempt to deny difference.

As with the monograph on the Lisu by Otome KLEIN HUTHEESING (1990), it is a story of equality in the traditional society being undermined by various forms of state intervention. The difference, however, seems to be in the resilience of the cultural ideology of the dyad which Du finds among the Lahu in Lancang in spite of the devastating effects of the Maoist era. Yet, even though it is pointed out that "dysfunctional" cases may be found within the traditional system, all in all the argument is that of dyads in tradition versus dysfunction brought by external factors, namely the state policies. As the author states, the community she chose to study was one that local people acknowledged to be very true to traditional Lahu principles. In effect, the book emphasizes Lahu tradition and dyadic principles, while neglecting to pursue the varied developments as glimpsed, for example, in the passing mention of women who marry into rural Han society, or those who work in the cities.

As an issue of political agenda for feminists and as a question of human rights, gender equality is an enduring question. In academic discourse, especially in attempts at understanding gender in other societies, gender equality has turned out to be a rather difficult concept to deal with. What or whose measure are we using in comparison? Much debate had taken place in the anthropology of gender in the 1970s, in which arguments were made between "universal subordination of women" and the existence of egalitarian societies that had been encroached by capitalist market system and state, bringing inequality. Subsequently, cross-cultural attempts to compare the status of women were themselves questioned, bringing to the fore a more contextualized (culturally and historically) view of gender in other societies. This book picks up on the old-time debate on the possibility of egalitarianism, using structural-functional analysis, placing it in the context of increasing state intervention in Lancang after the 1940s. The author locates the changes most affecting the existing traditional egalitarianism in the imposed political-administrative system since the 1940s, which undermined the dyadic

male-female leadership. It seems that for the author, the dyad is synonymous with egalitarianism. By over-emphasis on the equality issue, the richer possibilities of understanding the dyad and critiquing the biases in the discourse of feminism are concealed, even though they are amply suggested in the ethnography. It is the suggested understanding of a very different way of conceptualizing or constructing gender, rather than the argument for egalitarianism, that is the far greater contribution of this book towards gender studies. The author challenges feminist anthropology for holding onto the “ideal of utopia” of gender-egalitarian society. The problem with this utopia is not that it hinders us from recognizing egalitarianism where it actually exists, as the author claims, but rather that it is a utopia born as an antithesis of gender construction in a specific socio-cultural setting.

The author briefly mentions her own preconceptions of gender based on the ying-yang worldview. It would have been a further critique to feminist anthropology if she could pursue the interaction between her own preconceptions and those she found in the Lahu dyadic worldview, positioning herself in this very finely written and utterly enjoyable ethnography.

REFERENCE CITED

KLEIN HUTHEESING, Otome

1990 *Emerging Sexual Inequality among the Lisu of Northern Thailand: The Waning of Dog and Elephant Repute*. Leiden: E. J. Brill

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GE Liangyan, *Out of the Margins: The Rise of Chinese Vernacular Fiction*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2001. ix + 293 pages. Glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$47.00; ISBN 0-8248-2370-2.

Shuihu zhuan (“Water Margin”) first appeared in print in the sixteenth century. It is China’s earliest full-length fictional narrative in true vernacular prose, and is also the product of long-term interaction of oral and written traditions. Liangyan Ge considers the evolution of *Shuihu zhuan* and the rise of vernacular fiction against the background of the vernacularization of premodern Chinese literature as a whole.

In Chapter 1, Vernacularization before *Shuihu zhuan*, he reviews the process of vernacularization in early literary prose and concludes that the vernacular works before *Shuihu zhuan* opened the way for the advent of *Shuihu zhuan*.

Chapter 2, Told or Written: That Is the Question, is a discussion about the formative process of the narrative in *Shuihu zhuan*. He proposes that *Shuihu zhuan* should be considered both a work of oral provenance and a literary innovation by men of letters.

Chapter 3, The Narrative Pattern: The Uniform versus the Multiform, examines the frequently recurring thematic patterns of the narrative. He considers that the story making in *Shuihu zhuan* is recurrent on two different levels, a stereotyped sequence, and a segmental variant serving.

Chapter 4, From Voice to Text: The Orality-Writing Dynamic, addresses the issue of the textualization of the work. He shows that the *fanben* text of the novel traversed a long course of evolution and maturation in which both writing and orality played indispensable roles.

In Chapter 5, The Engine of Narrative Making: Audience, Storytellers, and *Shuhui xiansheng*, he concludes that the recurrent elements of storymaking derived from the needs of