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*Fieldwork Connections: The Fabric of Ethnographic
Collaboration in China and America* (review)

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Bamo Ayi, Stevan Harrell, and Ma Lunzy. *Fieldwork Connections: The Fabric of Ethnographic Collaboration in China and America*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. 330 pp. Paper, \$30.00

HO TS'UI-P'ING, *Academia Sinica*

Fieldwork Connections tells of the collaborative relationship among three Yi researchers—Bamo Ayi, Stevan Harrell, and Ma Lunzy. The Yi, one of China's fifty-six nationalities, live mostly in the southwestern provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, and according to the 2000 census, has a population numbering as high as 7,762,286. Stories of collaboration in this book begin with the description of Harrell's fieldwork project on ethnic relations in southwestern China (1991–94), are developed and enhanced through his sponsoring of the International Conference on the Yi in Seattle in 1995, and continue up to the exhibition and publication of *Mountain Patterns: The Survival of Nuosu Culture in China* (2000), which was written by Harrell and Bamo Qubumo and Ma Erzi. (Nuosu refers to "an ethnic group of about two million members" who are "part of the Yi" nationality [309].) Bamo Qubumo is a folklorist and Bamo Ayi's sister.

Among scholars doing research on China's southwest, the teamwork of Harrell, the Bamo sisters, and Ma is well known. They gained international fame from influential academic exchanges by holding international conferences on Yi studies. After Seattle (1995); Trier, Germany (1998); and Yunnan, China (2000); the Fourth International Conference on the Yi was held in 2005 at Meigu, Sichuan, one of the fieldwork bases of Harrell, Bamo, and Ma, where 104 papers or abstracts were given. In China, accounts in newsletters or on Web sites of their collaborative research (see <http://www.yizuren.com>), articles coauthored by Bamo Ayi and Harrell, and translations of Harrell's

articles and books are widely read and easily accessible. The participation of Father Benoit Vermander from Taipei Ricci Institute has further enhanced the collaboration between Harrell and Ma to social services. Together, they built an elementary school in 2000 and a “global village” in Yanyuan, Ma’s hometown (Vermander 2005, 171–88). *Fieldwork Connections* details the germination and development of their relationship in specifically shaping Harrell’s book *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (2001), the collaborative Yi exhibition, and the coauthored book on that exhibition. Most importantly, the book exemplifies how a long-lasting collaboration begun from fieldwork connections is enhanced through conscientious and sincere efforts in reciprocity.

In the preface, Stevan Harrell tells how the book originated, was written, and organized. Harrell emphasizes the book’s goal in inviting readers to “think about ethnography” rather than contributing to any theoretical discussion on ethnographic problems (xi). The main body of the book is in three parts, with nineteen chapters and an epilogue. Part 1, “Origins” (chaps. 1–3), gives an account of each author’s upbringing in an ethnic environment, leading to careers in anthropology (Bamo and Harrell) and teaching in middle school (Ma). Part 2, “China” (chaps. 4–14), begins with Bamo and Harrell individually relating their research in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, and moves on to their encounter with Harrell’s fieldwork on ethnic relations and education in 1991, 1993, and 1994. The book’s title, *Fieldwork Connections*, originated from these chapters, in which Ma and Bamo Ayi are shown as indispensable to Harrell’s fieldwork. Part 3, “America” (chaps. 15–19), has each author, and Bamo Qubumo, contributing one chapter on their reflections of their first contact in the United States (Ma), the first research trip to the Seattle Methodist Church (Bamo Ayi), and the collaborative exhibition of Nuosu material culture, *Mountain Patterns*, at the Burke Museum in Seattle (Ma, Bamo Qubumo, and Harrell).

Bamo Ayi tells us in chapter 1 how she, being half Yi from a noble Yi class, was raised in the predominantly Han environment. At their father’s urging, the three sisters formed strong bonds in their Yi identity and careers in Yi research. In chapter 2, Ma tells of how he grew up under the Han shadow, where tension, mutual contempt, and conflicts between Han and Nuosu were most common, and how his education was jeopardized by the general political turmoil and his classification

as the descendant of an exploitative slave-owning landlord. Harrell gives his account in chapter 3 of being white without any “ethnic” identity problems, and becoming an anthropologist doing fieldwork in Taiwan.

Part 2 begins with Bamo Ayi’s career in anthropology and research on the ritual specialist Bimo (chap. 4). Harrell then tells of his 1987–88 fieldwork project in southwestern China on the influences of economic modernization on family structure, the fieldwork situation, and the networks established (chap. 5). From this trip, Harrell begins his fieldwork connection stories in Chengdu, Panzhuhua, in Sichuan. Chapters 7–13 revolve around Harrell’s later ethnic-relations field trips in Sichuan from 1991 on, during which Ma, Bamo Ayi, and Harrell’s relationship began to form and were gradually strengthened through their work together. Each chapter has interesting anecdotes that lead to their mutual commitment to reciprocity and the ongoing collaboration described in part 3. Abundant examples of reciprocity among Harrell, Bamo, and Ma are documented. Ma leads, accompanies, and translates for Harrell on his field trips of 1991, 1993, and 1994, all of which first began as an assigned duty from his unit (chaps. 7–10 and 12–13). In acknowledging Ma’s “ethnographic authority” as a native scholar and his direct contribution to Harrell’s knowledge of Yi, Harrell reciprocates first with an invitation for Ma to attend the First International Conference on Yi in Seattle (chap. 15), and then for the collaboration on the Exhibition on Yi in Seattle (chaps. 17 and 19). Reciprocity between Harrell and Bamo Ayi begins with Harrell’s invitation to her, the first Yi with a doctorate to already have extensive fieldwork experience, to participate in the First International Conference on Yi; Bamo reciprocates and accompanies Harrell to Yi fieldwork sites (chaps. 11 and 12). Bamo Ayi also translates Harrell’s book into Chinese, coauthoring with Harrell the Chinese publication. Harrell then sponsors Bamo’s research trip in Seattle on the Methodist Church, arranges for her boarding with a member of the church, and establishes a solid foundation for her research (chap. 16). Ma quite appropriately titles their mutual assistance to each other in China and America as “horse leading” or being “horse leader” to each other (100ff.). In all, eleven out of nineteen chapters in the book are about how mutual trust and respect were formed through “horse leading,” and the strong bond woven by mutual, conscientious efforts in reciprocity. The

collaborations follow later, starting especially from when they worked on the museum exhibition together.

In part 3, three chapters document each curator's views on the museum exhibition. Ma first describes in detail the process of buying items for the museum collection in 1999 (chap. 17). In his usual responsible and frank style, he records his ambivalent feelings about buying artifacts on a limited budget from his relatives and experienced sellers or middlemen. The former usually left them to decide the price, while the latter began bargaining by setting an outrageous price initially. He also records the incessant self-doubt of whether the Seattle audience of the Burke Museum can comprehend and share what he experienced with the Nuosu artifacts collected, and his unwavering belief in the importance of claiming Nuosu culture's position in the world through these beautiful collections (255–56).

In chapter 18, "Conceptualizing Mountain Patterns," Bamo Qubumo writes about the process of designing and putting on the exhibition. Her description of the conflicts, their resolution, and the never-ending brainstorming and negotiations among Harrell, museum professionals, and herself on various issues, vividly depicts the process of creating the exhibition. The issues include why certain themes, pictures, and artifacts were chosen and displayed the way they were, how the display plan was designed, and how controversial effects of the exhibition on the audience were resolved. It also tells us how, when differing opinions on exhibition themes occurred, the decision to follow the "native scholar"—Bamo Qubumo—was made. In the exhibition, Bamo considers herself to be carrying out her mission to "'defend' the essence of my culture . . . with the minimum possible loss of cultural meaning" (260). The revelation of "caste" ideology in clothing, and the controversy in displaying the funeral pyre exemplify Bamo's position on exhibition in a most lively way.

If any unease about the general direction of the exhibition results from reading the chapters by the two curators of Mountain Patterns, it is quite nicely relieved by the third curator's delineation in chapter 19, "Celebrating Mountain Patterns." Harrell defines the exhibition as "celebrating" the survival of Nuosu culture in China. Harrell says, just as Nuosu celebrate social immortality at funerals by wearing their best attire show their bravery and beauty, the exhibition intends to show that "the magnificent arts of the Nuosu live on, enduring first the Cultural

Revolution and now globalization. In *Mountain Patterns* we, too, celebrate” (285).

The epilogue places the book against the background of anthropological discussion on the epistemological problem of knowing the subject of research, the rhetorical problems in argument, the emotional problem of personal relationships, and the ethical problem of sensitive topics. Harrell clearly states the book’s purpose is not to analyze any of the problems, or to provide any answers to these problems.

This book is useful to everyone interested in ethnographic fieldwork. However, based on my own experience reading this book, I can offer a suggestion to readers in anthropology. I paused many times while reading part 2, in which Ma starts his “horse-leading” job with Harrell, and found it useful to have read the epilogue first to better follow the rest of the book, despite Harrell’s design of the epilogue as optional reading (xi). I also found it difficult to relate Bamo Ayi’s chapters on her research on the Nuosu ritual specialist Bimo (chaps. 4, 6, and 14) to the general theme of the book. It seems a shame to read Bamo’s intense accounts of her work on Nuosu Bimo in monologue, without any exchange of ideas between Harrell, Ma, and herself. Nor did her research in Seattle on the Methodist Church (chap. 16), even with Harrell’s arranging the perfect family to stay with, offer any intellectual dialogue.

One can’t but admire the wonderful collaborative relationship formed by Harrell, Bamo, and Ma; the impressive funding and publishing support Harrell was able to secure, and finally, the effective, solid results the team was able to deliver. Three books directly related to this collaboration have already been published. The University of Washington Press published the first book, *Mountain Patterns* (2000), to accompany the *Mountain Patterns* exhibition in the Burke Museum, as previously mentioned. The second book, *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China*, published by the University of California Press and edited by Stevan Harrell (2001), was compiled from papers given at the First International Yi Conference, which Ma wrote about in chapter 15 of this book. The third book, which resulted from the fieldwork discussed in chapters 7 through 13 of this book, is *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (2001), also published by University of Washington Press. These are achievements not many others can equal.

In all, *Fieldwork Connections* gives us good stories of ethnographic processes of collaboration, and the marvelous accomplishment that perhaps could be achieved only through the particular chemistry among

Harrell, Bamo, and Ma under the specific context of scholarly exchange at the turn of the century. However, the book's underlying theme of conscientious reciprocity, showing how successful collaboration can evolve from fieldwork networks, seems general enough for all ethnographic fieldworkers to learn from.

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Paper, \$29.95.

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The *Writing in the San/d* anthology is an intriguing experiment in collaborative methods and so is quite apt for inclusion in this first volume of *Collaborative Anthropologies*. It is important both as a device to raise consciousness about the human side of anthropological research and as a challenge to some of the more traditional modes of ethnographic writing. Editor Keyan Tomaselli has been for some years gathering his students in Culture, Communication, and Media Studies (CCMS) at the University of Kwazulu Natal (Durban, South Africa) and taking them, along with members of his own family, to research sites in South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia to interact with San people.

The interactions of this loosely defined research group with San communities and individuals have been more or less informal, but at the same time they have been concerned quite fixedly with the mediation, representation, and phenomenology of Ethnographic Encounter, writ large. Thus the activity of this group of researchers sits squarely